

MAN FROM THE SUN

The Story of the Kosambis

Indrayani Sawkar

The canvas of *Man from the Sun* stretches over history, portraying the life and times of Dharmanand Kosambi.

This biographical novel written by Indrayani Sawkar, Kosambi's grand-daughter brings to life an age that was steeped in concepts and notions that belong to a culture of another time.

This is the story of Bapu or Dharmanand Kosambi, the scholar and philosopher who had the courage to transcend middle class notions regarding family and occupation and contained the irrepressible desire to move towards an existence that would reach philosophical heights. It depicts his leap from mediocrity to intellectual and spiritual achievement, that took shape in the form of a study of Buddhism and Jainism, monkhood in Sri Lanka and professorship at Harvard and Leningrad. It is the story of Bala, Bapu's wife, a strong-willed personality, bristling with sharp edges, who looked at her life as a challenge and fought the battle with courage. Though looked upon as an angry woman, she did brim with love for people, especially her husband, who almost never shared his life with her. *Man from the Sun* is also the story of the Kosambi family - where every individual has a distinct personality that impresses upon your mind. The flow is simple, starting from a birth to a unique death - *Sallekhan* - a practice where the individual fasts unto death; and also represents the final phase of man's spirituality. The landscape shifts continuously, introducing you to places that change the world around them. Here's a novel that offers you a glimpse of history and of individuals who've crossed several barriers to reach a point of transcendence.

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**POPULAR PRAKASHAN
MUMBAI**

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*To
My grandchildren*

*Karishma and Sameera Sanghvi
Devika and Akash Nadkarni
Siran and Alexan Cinar
Tanvi and Nihal Shah*

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FOREWORD

Dharmanand Kosambi was my grandfather. I am tremendously proud of and grateful for the fact that somewhere in my mind, psyche and soul there lurk traits that I inherited from him, whatever they be for. Even though he is no more in this world and even though my total association with him in a span of twelve years was not more than three months, I still feel a great rapport with him. I am the daughter of his third child and second daughter Manorama, with a second name twice removed from him. I am the only one who has talked about him and written first person stories for the media. However, these were short articles intended only to commemorate his work. Now I wish to preserve the whole legend, his greatness and family. I have based this biographical novel on Nivedan, his autobiography, my own memories, those left behind by my late mother, Manutai and talks that I had with a few others.

Even though I was a child when he visited us, I have very vivid recollections of him. He was tall and lean and bearded. He was dressed in ankle-length white dhoti and zabba and pale orange vest, all stitched from coarse khadi cloth. He wore khadawas, wooden chappals, wooden soles with a knob for the two big toes to grasp. If we returned from school and noticed these khadawas by the door we knew that Bapu was visiting us. My brother Hemi and I often tried to grasp the knob with our toes and walk but failed miserably. But Bapu could walk in them like he was wearing Reebok shoes. He didn't walk on these on the roads of Mumbai. But informed us that he had done so in Burma when he went begging. This is around the years 1939-40 when we lived in a small flat at second lane Hindu Colony, in a building named Shriram Bhuvan. Now its name is changed to Kajale Sadan.

Once our mother took us to visit him at his Vihara at Parel, Mumbai. I found out more about this Vihara in his biography. But the maximum time I spent with him was at Indore in April-May of 1940. (I found the exact dates from a letter he had written to his friend Anna Sukhthankar). Once after that I had fleetingly met him at my uncle's place.

At Indore he took me for a walk twice daily. This was a highly scintillating and rewarding experience. He quoted profusely from Sanskrit, Pali, English, Marathi and Russian books. He constantly slipped down his memory lane and spoke of the people that he had met or the things that had happened to him. Everything was just an event, nothing was banal or enjoyable. He spoke of his childhood, his travels

and the books that he had read. He once taught me how to make a leaf plate. He found a bamboo, cut a piece off it with a scythe and with a knife cut it further into half inch long sticks, the thickness of a toothpick. We then sat by a heap of banyan leaves and he showed me how to hold two leaves together and stitch them with the bamboo picks. It was clever stitching, a proper science. Each leaf had to be held in a certain way, each leaf had to be under another at one end and above another at the other. One began at the centre and continued in clockwise or anticlockwise circles till one got as large a plate as was desired. There were two types of stitches too. But I was a dismal failure. My plates were a travesty. I tore the leaves, they fell off my butter fingers. I could never stitch more than two. Bapu even tried to train me to stitch three leaves together. Apparently kids in Goa did this. But here too I was a failure.

He told me that stitching the leaf plates had been his first chore as a kid, that all the kids in his household were taught to do this at a very early age and they spent hours at it, storing the plates in a room. They needed stacks and stacks of these plates for they were disposable and were used to feed the vast households, the battalions of guests and also as lids and for storage.

He told me that if ever an elder person caught the tiny pick in his teeth while he was eating his food, all the kids who had made them would be summoned and given a tongue-lashing.

From such a culture, the leap to monkhood in Sri Lanka and professorship at Harvard and Leningrad was little short of a miracle. More incredulous is the fact that he was born with the potential. Contemporary society neither helped nor appreciated his inborn urge. He had to put in singlehandedly, and sans funds, inhuman efforts and struggles to fulfil it. Like all giant leaps, even though from mediocrity to intellectual and spiritual achievement, this leap too played havoc with his family. It was hard to be the children of this unusual man. There were certain deprivations and there were certain rewards. Security, a finely bonded family life and a thoughtfully chalked out blue print for their future were missing. In a sense the Kosambis were selfmade too, like their father, though in different ways. Looking for meaningful goals was one of the main rewards of being the children of this man. A high value was set on scholarship by all his children and grandchildren. It hardened into a family tradition. No one chased money. Everyone's heart was set on securing the first rank and a degree.

I was very close to my grandmother, aunts and uncle, as close as a teenager could be. I have registered my grandfather as a soft personality and my grandmother as a strong one, bristling with very sharp edges. He was on his own wavelength all the time, instilling the gospels of the Buddha into us and everybody else. If he found people

corrosive, unsuitable, inconvenient or disagreeable in any way, he never said so. He just moved on.

She did not care for such tolerance or magnanimity. She took everybody head on. She called a spade a spade. She read innuendoes and taunts in the most innocuous statement. She was as quick to take offence as she was to rise to defense. She nursed grouses for years and vented them whenever an opportunity arose. Tirelessly, she sought explanations from friends, foes and kids alike. In many ways Bala and Bapu were the exact opposites of one another, yet had profound love for one another too.

Unfortunately the autobiography is silent on this most interesting part of his life: the relationships within the family, their interactions.

"He is bound to be. He did not know that the family existed." My brothers Hemi (Hemant) and Avi (Avinash) say.

My grandmother Bala impressed us as an angry woman. Yet like Bapu she was a people lover too. Of the children Manik was the only one who was frank and outgoing and loved people's company. She was an absolute extrovert. Baba, the son, could take people only when he had time for them. Manu, my mother, could love only those who showed absolute obeisance to her dictates. Kamlu was a withdrawn child. She did brim with love for people. But needed to be whisked out of her ivory tower.

My mother had one more personality disorder fostered by the jolts she had received in childhood. She had been transported from Pune to Chikhali, then shoved into the Huzurpaga hostel, thence to Ahilyashrama Hostel at Indore and finally ensconced in Manik's home. Throughout this turmoil she cherished but one dream, to own a house and raise a well-knit family. She combed and plaited my hair two times a day till I was fourteen because as a child she had to coax somebody at the hostel to comb hers. She had servants to wash my brothers' feet and change them into fresh attires three or four times a day for she had been deprived of such a concern herself. And she beat them mercilessly with a colleander stick when they failed to learn the alphabet.

The forces that interacted in the Kosambi children were unusual. I want to preserve their story for posterity.

Indrayani Sawkar

Mumbai,
February 2000

ONE
May 1891

Chikhali, a minuscule village in Goa. Population less than two hundred, living in four or five brick houses belonging to the Lauds, all cousins and landlords, and Kathkaris, their bonded labour, living in squalour. Time, the scorching hot month of May.

The biggest of the Laud houses belonged to Sadba Laud, fifty-eight, short and stocky with sunken eyes and cheeks set in a small, oval face. Like all other houses in Chikhali Sadba's too was a vast, sprawling brick structure comprising numerous rooms branching off from the western side of a vast central hall called the Big Room, spacious verandahs on the other three sides, a large cowpen beyond the back verandah and spacious yards all around. Hectic activity had started here more than an hour before daybreak. Women were scurrying around in the faint glimmer of oil lamps, attending to a myriad chores in the kitchen, light the big chulla, wash rice, set it to boil, cut vegetables and so on.

Sadba, a light sleeper, was the first to get out of his bed, a mattress spread on the front verandah. He walked to the edge of the front verandah and peered in the dark, the first thing he loved to do after getting out of his bed. It was almost a compulsion for him to take a look at Mother Nature looming out there and read her moods. He did it now. His night vision was extraordinary.

Sparsely dotted by fading stars, the sky was a breathtaking ink blue, slightly lighter than the rest of the world still swaddled in pitch dark. Sadba passed a roving eye over the vast vista, his front garden, a long patch of thick and wild verdure, rocks and tall grass, the creek and the rolling green hills. A soft predawn grey light marked the east and sharpened the outlines of Chikhali's skyline, hills, tree tops and a few temples and houses. The ripples over the creek filled the air with a soft hypnotic sound. A flurry of breeze softly rustled the leaves and grass. It was heaven!

Sadba interpreted the exquisiteness of Mother Nature as a good omen, an assurance that the mission the Lauds would soon be setting out for, Bala's engagement with Dharma Kosambi, one more marriage alliance between the Lauds at Chikhali and the Kosambis at Sankhwai,

would bring everybody concerned unfailing happiness. For them all Nature was a supreme and uncontrollable power, its fury and kindness unpredictable. They constantly took stock of her moods and came up with predictions. Primitive living conditions had made them all strong believers in the saving grace of superstition and the occult.

"Ladu! Wawa, Phatu! It is time to wake up," Sadba addressed three shapes who were bundled up on mattresses next to his on the front verandah. Ladu, his thirty-seven year old son. Wawa, an old uncle and Phatu, a cousin from Aroben, another village on the other side of the creek. He and Ladu had chosen to sleep here because they would be leaving far earlier than usual, at daybreak actually, and they did not want to wake up the children and guests. The troupe sprang to their feet and started lumbering through the flower garden in the front and the vegetable garden at the side and back without bothering to seek assistance from an oil lamp. They all had the night vision of an owl.

The unbearable summer heat had not afflicted the fertile red soil Chikhali was known for. Sadba's huge yard retained enough moisture to sustain a wild but lush overgrowth of foliage. The front garden abounded in creepers of jai, jui, sayli, bushes of marigold, mogra, kunda, raatrani, aboli and trees of booch, bakul, tagar, kanheri and a few wild roses here and there. All local flowers except for surangi, the tiny yellow flowers with a heady smell which by consensus of opinion had been expelled from their gardens as its pollen was supposed to be harmful to one's respiratory system. The other three sides of the yard were swilling over with fruit trees and vegetables: creepers of a variety of beans and all kinds of marrows and cucumbers, eggplants, radishes, yams, bhindi, leafy vegetables, chillies, pumpkins, tall trees of jambhul, jackfruit, bananas, mangoes and shevga, their roots and even trunks hidden in tall grass. There was no concept of aesthetic landscaping anywhere. The idea was to get in as many varieties as one could find and nature could foster. All the same, this lack of planning had given their gardens a breathtaking wild grandeur of its own.

In addition, the Lauds had vegetable gardens all over Chikhali and paddy fields nearby. The surrounding hills were full of cashews, berries, jambhuls and jackfruits. The creek abounded in scrumptious fish. The masters as well as their dependents lived happily off this abundance of nature.

The four Lauds set out for the brush in the hills, the knots of their tonsured hair fluttering gently in the cool sea breeze and lapping against their shaved heads. They were all small-statured and had narrow

heartshaped faces, broad brows and pointed chins. They wore sleeveless vests of Manchester poplin, short dhotis of Dacca muslin and thick handmade chappals of untanned leather. Later for their outing they would get into their German made pump shoes. Trade encouraged by the Portuguese had imbibed in them a taste of European luxuries. They lived in a mixed cultural world, that of modern European possessions and obdurate ancient Hindu tradition.

They halted briefly at a shelf beyond the well to pick up small pitchers of water which they would use to wash themselves with. Chikhali, like the rest of the country, was deprived of a drainage system, plumbing, bathroom or toilet facilities of any kind. It was the brush for everybody, men and women, high castes and low castes. However, out of consideration for the ladies' modesty most of the Lauds had built minuscule cells with walls of dry palm fronds to be used for baths by them. The Kathkari women had theirs by the well. There was a special small well for them. They bathed with their clothes on of course. And by tacit understanding they were left alone in the afternoon to have a bath there in some kind of privacy.

Next the Laud masters halted by the row of huts that stretched beyond their well and called out for their kulaks. The understanding bordering on an unwritten law was that for a share of the paddy and other crops these bonded families provide all kinds of services to the landowners, work in their fields and gardens and attend to all menial house chores, washing, cleaning, repairing, plastering floors with cowdung, tending the cows, and other such activities. The Lauds were reputed to be good masters, they took their care in every way, gave them land for their huts, medicines, old and new clothes, left over food and even cash and some extra grain in times of duress.

"Narayan ! Jagu!" Ladu called out in his loud no-nonsense voice. Two young boys, half-clad in tattered over-size shorts slipped out of their huts rubbing the last vestiges of sleep off their sunken eyes. They relieved their masters of the burden of the pitchers and began to walk in front of them. The Lauds got themselves escorted by these boys to take care of the danger of snakes, foxes, hyenas and occasionally even a panther. The group made it to the hills in five minutes.

Their morning ritual over, they all sprinted back to the well, deposited the pitchers in their place and halted nearby. The two boys went into action pulling up water from the well and pouring it over their masters' hands and feet. From here the troupe progressed to enormous slabs of stone placed close to the well. The boys scampered

inside and fetched imported soap, tooth powder made from charcoal powder and salt, *panchas* and fine *dhotis* and shirts. They pulled up more water, scrubbed heads, backs and feet with soap and even helped their masters dry and dress themselves.

The boys now stayed back to wash the clothes and scrub the pitchers. The masters entered the house through the back door. An appetizing aroma of boiling rice gruel wafted over to them from the kitchen which was to the left of the back verandah. In the blazing light of the crackling logs of wood in the chullah they could see five women seated there performing diverse chores. They were Luxumbai, Sadba's wife and the guests. The gruel had been set to cook in a four litre pan. This was for the early breakfast of the departing party. For the rest, the kids, the teaming guests and the servants, a huge cauldron that could comfortably hide a five-year-old kid would be set on the chullah as soon as this one was taken off.

"Is Vachha ready?" Sadba queried. Vachha was Ladudada's wife as well as cousin, nee Kosambi, petite and very fair with a round smiling face.

"Almost. She has had her bath. She is in her room getting ready," someone answered. The men nodded and registered satisfaction.

The foursome crossed the room next to the kitchen which was the Middle Room, a living room for the ladies, and stepped into the Big Room. This was a vast room, 20 ft by 40 ft. It had verandahs on two of its sides, the front and the eastern. On the other side were four bedrooms, two storerooms, the prayer room and a small junk room. The Big Room was a multipurpose room used as the men's dining room, the children's study and playroom and the guests' communal bedroom too whenever they turned up in a crowd. The house abounded in guests at all times. All households did. The Goans were a closeknit group. They were self-sufficient and self-satisfied going out of their way to help each other in every way. This had led to intermarriages between cousins and brought this community even closer. They loved to visit one another socially for idle banter and for important social and religious functions. This had turned the guests into a strong institution, for the tortuous conditions of travel made social visits of brief duration worthless. Still Sadba and the others were bent on making a day's trip today.

A mat was spread in the Big Room and an oil lamp placed nearby. The men did not need it. But it was a precautionary measure against tripping. They sat crosslegged over the mat. An old woman

emerged from the kitchen carrying deep plates of brass which she placed before the men. Luxumbai followed with a brass serving bowl and a ladle made of coconut shell. She served spoonfuls of the steaming hot gruel to them all, disappeared, came back with a slice of pickled mango served over a dry jackfruit leaf and pumpkin bhaji in leaf bowls. They all ate heartily though hurriedly, deftly picking up the rice floating in the hot liquid with their fingers, then balling it up and flinging it in their open mouths. From time to time they lifted the plates to their lips and took a swig or two of the hot liquid and nibbled at the red hot slice of raw mango. They just loved gruel, their staple food.

"Yedu and his son are here to report that the boats have arrived, Luxumbai informed them. Craning their necks they could see two tall muscled figures with dark leathery complexions. Yedu clad in a groincloth and tattered shirt, his son clad in ancient shorts. They were standing obsequiously by the steps of the side verandah.

"Feed them some gruel and bring out the food hampers. I will call Kashba," Ladu remarked.

Luxumbai served some gruel in two huge leaf bowls and placed them on the floor of the back verandah. People who belonged to a lower caste were not served food inside the upper-caste households. Yedu and his son began to slurp the gruel lustily. They didn't find the discrimination abrasive. Rice was getting scarcer and scarcer day by day and would disappear completely from their households. To them the gruel was a luxury. The poor were already obliged to live on Nachni bread or Nachni flour soup till the new crop of rice came in October. The Lauds were aware of their predicament. They were generous with gruel.

Kashba Laud, Sadba's younger neighbour, was already out in his front garden waiting for them. Pachubai, his wife slightly darker than Vachhabai, small and chubby, was with him. Like Vachhabai, Pachubai too was stunningly turned out in a cottorisilk Shahapur nine-yard-sari. Both ladies wore their heavy jewellery: *gots*, *patlis* and bangles, pearl studs, two ropes of gold beads in addition to the *mangalsutra* and a tiny gold star over their left nostril. Their bonded boys soon tumbled out balancing on their head four large baskets stuffed with food. The two groups took to bantering lustily as soon as they set eyes on one another as if they were meeting after ages in spite of the fact that they visited one another ten times a day and when not visiting conversed across their yards.

"Why are you carrying stuff to the Kosambis? You are their

son-in-law. *They* should give you hampers, not the other way round," Kashba quipped referring to Ladudada's status of a son-in-law of Damodarbab Kosambi. Kashba too was short and wiry like his cousins and had a witty expression. Tradition demanded that the flow of precious gifts be from the bride's parents to the groom's parents and not the other way round.

"That is true. But I am not only their son-in-law. I am Dharma's cousin too. As you know I grew up in Damodarbab's house. Vachha was my reward for getting out of their house," Ladu was quick to return the joke. Luxumbai, his mother was Damodarbab's sister. The latter had lodged Sadba's entire family in his own house in order to help them. Sadba had moved to Chikhali only after he had made some money through trading. Vachha was Damodarbab's daughter. Such marriages between the sister's son and brother's daughter were exceedingly common amidst the Saraswat Brahmins of Goa. In fact such pairs, if eligible, were considered to be as good as engaged right from the girl's birth.

"I always take a hamper to them in summer," Vachhabai explained gravely to Pachubai. "Coconuts and a few garden vegetables is all that they have. Everything else they have to buy, even fish. So I give them dry fish, kokums, dry jackfruit sections, ripe mango jam, Nachni flour, beans, cashewnuts and even papads." There was a marked tone of sadness in Vachhabai's voice. Her mother, Anandibai, had passed away a few months after the birth of Dharma, her youngest sibling. The wife of her eldest brother Ramchandra, called Anandibai too, could turn out the daily meals. But the massive sun-drying and storing activities required to see them through the difficult months of monsoon were beyond her ability. Nor did they have paddy fields and vegetable gardens like the Lauds. Their resources were limited.

Damodarbab's father had leased a coconut orchard for ninety years. He made a reasonably good living out of it. But income from it was in no way comparable to the Lauds' who were rich landowners. Vachha was aggrieved by the disparity in their circumstances and helped with foodstuff whenever she could. Pachubai knew all this of course. Their topics of conversation invariably pivoted round Vachha's anguish. At the same time she had no complaints about effecting an engagement between Bala, her second daughter and Dharma, Damodarbab's youngest son, considerations of wealth or even education played very little part in matchmaking. The main consideration that swerved the balance in favour of a particular boy was the kindness of his parents. Everybody

was careful to avoid harsh treatment for their daughter.

Pachubai had packed her basket with goodies mostly, laddus and chaklis made of parboiled rice flour, boiled milk pedhas, coconut toffee and a large bag of cashews. She had not deemed it fit to carry stuff like lentils and rice flour, that might be misconstrued as a sly innuendo that the Kosambis needed to be helped. She didn't want to risk the least faux pas. Since Bala, her daughter would be living with them when she came of age, Pachubai did not want to erode their existing camaraderie in any way.

"Come on ladies, speed!" Ladudada was quick to hurry them. They had a long and arduous journey before them and he desired to avoid being outdoors during the hottest hours of the afternoon.

Bantering and guffawing they started walking to the creek a furlong away from their front yards. A faint trail led to the creek through a thick growth of tall grass and brush which tickled their bare ankles. Occasionally they could sight the slithering movement of an early snake. Most of these were nonpoisonous. Anyway the reptiles didn't worry anyone. They had learnt to live cohesively with Mother Nature. The snakes were all over the place, creeping through grass, curled up against the branches of trees, in rivers and poised along walls of palm fronds. They had even been found hatching their eggs under the heap of mats in the store room. The east was an exquisite pale pink now, the landscape bathed in it. The air was cool and crisp, redolent with the scent of flowers and grass and reverberating with the hissing of the creek and rustle of the palms and other trees. Fish swam and leaped with gay abandon. Topaz-coloured kingfishers lunged at them, tailorbirds darted in and out of their swinging nests, *Titwis* huddled by their young ones in the grass, shrilling angrily, cuckoos filled the air with their musical notes and in the cowpens cattle mooed to be taken out to the pastures. It was Nature at her pristine, unpolluted purest self.

Two small rowboats were tied to the protuberant roots of a banyan tree on the bank. Yedu and his son helped them all get settled in them and then loaded the baskets.

By the time they reached Betim, a small port set at the mouth of the river Mandvi, the sun was a huge orange ball swinging over refulgent belts of oranges and scarlets. Hens cackled and darted across the red dust roads. Cows walked insouciantly towards the hills, chewing their early morning meal of grain. Bonded labour were scurrying around carrying baskets of mangoes, bananas and jackfruit. Landlords strutted after them carrying a silver cane in their hands. Goldpowdered palms

and roofs and roads were fast changing to an iridescent dusty white. The ocean and the river were emblazoned with the reflection of the riot of colour in the sky. In an hour's time the heat would be insufferable with the sun shining mercilessly on the scene below, turning both sky and sea into a giant cauldron of blinding molten gold.

The troupe scrambled into one of the large rowboats, *Padavs*, swirling about in water. It soon got filled with people and sacks and baskets of grain, vegetables, fruits and fish. They flapped around for a while in the Arabian sea, then entered the river Juari. Around eleven they docked at Sankhwal. Damodarbab had been informed in advance of their intended visit. He had sent two servants to receive them. He did have bonded labour, but they lived at the orchard and didn't handle household chores.

Damodarbab, scrawny, haggard and past sixty was stricken with inertia. He was crushed under the burden of the management of his coconut orchard. The orchard was a fine financial proposition. But the work was onerous and arduous. The coconut palms needed to be looked after with great care and guarded from monkeys and thieves. This was done by the bonded labourers of the Kosambis who lived at the site. But then they themselves needed to be kept under strict control and watch. They got paid thirty-three coconuts out of one thousand but they had no hesitation about grabbing a few extra ones if they could get away with it. Street smart that they were, their scruples had been eroded by the unceasing squalour they lived in. The coconuts on the palms needed to be counted morning and evening. This was excruciatingly difficult. But had to be done if one wanted to make a living out of the orchard. Luckily for Damodarbab his youngest son Dharma had now learnt to climb up a palm. This was hard too but easier than craning one's neck till it almost broke and still not being able to come up with the exact number of coconuts hanging high up there in a tight cluster.

Damodarbab was suffering from an acute shortage of manpower. He had two sons and four daughters. His eldest son Ramchandra, around twenty years older than Dharma, his youngest, was married, had children and had been managing the orchard with Damodarbab for the past twenty years. Old age had taken a toll on the latter's energy and he could not handle the strenuous work any more. Recently he had harnessed Dharma as Ramchandra's assistant. He hoped that Dharma would come up with more enthusiasm than he simulated. He was hardworking and obedient but not a bit interested in the orchard, Damodarbab knew. He also hoped that in course of time Bala would

help Anandibai and together they would put his household in a better shape. The realization that the Kosambis had not been doing very well recently was extremely irksome to Damodarbab. He wished that his sons would come up with some business that would restore their ancient wealth. There had been many ups and downs in their course of the family fortune.

As soon as the voices of the visiting party wafted to him he crossed the front verandah of his house and met them by the gate.

"Hello, Sadba! Wawa! You are early! Good!" Damodarbab greeted them.

"We got up at half past four. Want to make it back home by sunset." Wawa answered.

"What is the hurry? Stay for a couple of days." Damodarbab never failed to be the perfect host even though Anandibai was ill equipped to bear the burden of guests.

"Some other time. Right now we are all buffeted by summer chores," Kashba countered diplomatically. Damodarbab would have pressed them further. But at this point his attention got drawn to the baskets being carried to the back door by the servants.

"What hampers! Vaccha! What is this? Kashba! You shouldn't have been so formal!" Damodarbab exclaimed, overwhelmed.

"No formality. This is picnic. We will share the stuff with you," Kashba quipped.

Everybody beamed. The marriage was as good as fixed. Only the formalities of a spoken understanding remained to be performed. An exquisite mood of rejoicement and festivity gripped them all.

The two women walked to the back door to wash their hands and feet. For the men a big hunda and a pitcher had been provided for near the front verandah. The washing done, the men steered themselves to the sitting room and the women got ensconced in the middle one, their elation continuing to enhance.

Anandibai, Damodarbab's eldest daughter-in-law, and a few guests scampered out serving drinking water in copper pitchers and brass glasses and placing before them brass plates filled with goodies, gram flour *laddus*, hot and sweet *pohas*, biscuits from the bakery, jackfruit sections and cashews. They had started buying and serving biscuits recently for they were made by Guno, their barber, in a machine he had fabricated himself. Like all others they did not touch bread for it was made of flour fermented by toddy and allegedly made to rise by jumping over it.

"Damodarbab! There is food for a whole platoon here! Aren't we having lunch?" Ladudada jested.

"Of course you are. But that will take a while. Try the *laddus*. Anandi made them specially for you. She was up very early in the morning yesterday to grind channa dal. The fish was bought only half an hour back. All small stuff, prawns and tiny *sawandalas*. It is very difficult to find fish in summer," he answered gravely, unaffected by his son-in-law's witty remark. He constantly mourned the fact that he couldn't treat the Lauds as well as they treated the Kosambis.

"Our creek continues to be bountiful. We found a huge *chanak* yesterday," Kashba remarked.

Unlike the other Brahmins the Saraswat Brahmins were hearty fish-eaters. A story in the *Vatsa Purana* excuses this permissiveness. Once upon a time, a story recounts, the sage Vatsa survived a drought by living on fish. He was the only one to preserve the Vedas. All other sages had lost them, anguished by the fierce struggle to find food. Goddess Saraswati was pleased by Vatsa's astuteness. She forgave him for the lapse and gave permission to his descendents, the Saraswat Brahmins, to eat fish, not meat, eggs and poultry though.

They savoured the goodies and chattered idly for a while.

"Okay. Enough of idle talk now. Come to the main issue," Sadba suggested.

"If you say so," Kashba answered. He took a short pause to collect his thoughts, then proceeded. "We are here to extend a proposal for the marriage of Bala and Bhomya. I mean Dharma. We feel it would be a good match. Bala has begun to read and write and she is proving herself to be good at household chores. She would be an asset when she grows up. Bhomya too is taking an interest in your orchard. Together they would do well looking after the household and other agricultural ventures."

"That was some speech," Ladu clapped his hands. "Now the answer."

"What answer? You are our son-in-law. Your word is law in the Kosambi household. I give my wholehearted consent. Anandi! Get some *pedhas* or atleast some sugar. There is good news," Damodarbab called out. All the three ladies, Anandi, Vachha and Pachu came out. There were half a dozen more ladies there. They stood behind the door of the sitting room and began to eavesdrop, their faces animated. They knew that a marriage was being fixed and the news excited them. That was one event that, without fail, broke the monotony of their lifestyle.

"I couldn't make any. But Pachubai has got a tinfal. Have you fixed a date? Monsoon is going to be here soon," Anandi remarked.

"That is true. But this makes no difference to Kashba. All the Lauds at Chikhali would join forces and give you a feast to your heart's content. We will give you a bumper fish party after the religious ceremony is over. Our creek is overflowing with fish," Ladu assured them.

"Ladu has had his eyes on Bhomya ever since he stayed with him and learnt the three Rs from him," Kashba confided gleefully. At the age of nine Dharma had been packed off to Ladu for his first lesson of literacy. Ladudada was inordinately fond of teaching the kids. In the evening after he returned from his paddy fields he invariably sat with them and in the dim light of an oil lamp taught them to write using their forefinger as a pen and dust-sprayed board as slate.

"Let us not call him Bhomya any more. Let us find him a nice name," Pachubai exclaimed. She didn't want her son-in-law to have a slanderous name. Her comment was received amidst fervent nods of approval from everyone.

The group searched for a long time for a less offensive pet name. They rejected Bappa, Dada, Bhau and Baba for there was an abundance of these. Then agreed on Bapu, a new name that had come into vogue in Mumbai recently. So Bapu he was all his life.

Bhomya meant a dullard. Damodarbab had named him Dharma for charity, for he had been brought up on the milk of a fostermother. The Kosambis had been the victims of a terrible robbery when his mother was a few months pregnant with him. The robbers had got into their house at night, beaten everybody black and blue and taken away money, grain, cash and even jewellery worn by the women. The pregnant mother alone had given a tough and successful fight. She had clutched at a peg in the wall and refused to budge. Mercilessly the robbers had beaten her too. But they were fobbed and left eventually without touching her jewellery. She was so unwell, for a while that they thought she would lose the child. But miraculously, she didn't. However, she continued to be sick. She had no milk to feed him. Damodarbab had to employ a wet nurse. A few months later the mother passed away.

The child was named Dharma by his father for he had been brought up on the charity (*dharma*) of the wet nurse. He was a weakling. Till nine years of age he needed to be force fed. He never played with other kids. Fights scared him. He was pretty poor material as an eventual provider of the family, everyone commented. However Damodarbab

refused to accept the evaluation. At the child's birth an astrologer had prophesied that he would be a scholar though not a rich man. Damodarbab was content. He interpreted the prediction to mean that Dharma would atleast be the *Escrivao Da Comunidade*, a clerk in the local revenue department, and earn a decent salary. He had tirelessly made Dharma flit from school to school, lodging him at his daughter's homes in Chikhali, Belgaum and Madgaon. This had been of no avail, since Dharma, due to bouts of sickness couldn't stay long anywhere. His intended education was a total fiasco in spite of his proven intelligence.

But Dharma was an avid reader. He read everything that he could get his hands on, magazines, religious books and even labels on medicine bottles. He would have done wonders had he joined a Portuguese school. Lucrative government jobs awaited all those who did. However he was as wayward and adamant as he was bright, and scoffed at Portuguese after two attempts to learn that language failed miserably. He wanted to learn Sanskrit, he declared. Now this was sheer eccentricity, everybody contended, if not the height of stupidity and impracticality. Where could he learn this difficult ancient language? And supposing by some miracle he did, what job could he find for that particular skill?

There were very few schools in the first place and none for Sanskrit. Nor was this study going to be useful to him or his family in any way. He had read Dr. Bhandarkar's Sanskrit grammar written in Marathi, and aided by it, was frequently seen struggling with *Raghuvamsha*, Kalidasa's epic poem. Concerned people advised Damodarbab to put his foot down in time and knock some common sense into the boy's head. Damodarbab had no qualms doing it. He was an autocratic father. He had imbibed a stringent moral code in his children's mind cautioning them against indulging in vices like drinking, playing cards, acting on stage, gambling etc. But naturally Bapu's desire to learn Sanskrit couldn't be categorized as a vice or even a bad habit. Eccentricity though it was, it failed to ignite fury in the father's heart. It was a flaw, but not a vice. The few words of anger that Damodarbab managed to muster, turned out to be bereft of force. Also he was getting old and he desperately needed a son who would be a real helpmate in the matter of providing for his family. He did not have any more time to experiment further with Bapu's schooling. He had done the next best thing that he could; harnessed Bapu to the management of the orchard.

Bapu had complied. He was an extremely obedient child, also deeply steeped in the awareness of his responsibilities. He had taken to meekly following his father to the orchard and doing the needful there. All the same time Damodarbab could see that his heart was not in it; he simply went through the motions of counting the coconuts and attending to their watering, salting etc. Inwardly he was still hellbent on learning Sanskrit. Bapu's rationale just couldn't be touched no matter how much Damodarbab enjoined and others scoffed. The latter's only hope now was that marriage would cure the boy of such errant and impractical desires. Anyway it was a social must.

Around two in the afternoon, they had a hearty lunch comprising red hot fish curry, beans *bhaji*, cashew raita, fried *samwandalas*, papads, kokum kadhi, rice and banana halwa, a traditional sweet made on happy and celebrative occasions. A little later they walked back to the dock and got into the rowboat. An hour after sunset they were home, their hearts dancing with boundless joy.

"Bala! Come here." Kashba called out after he had washed himself and settled over the mat in the Big Room. A thin, roundfaced, curlyhaired girl, with lustrous eyes, dressed in printed chintz blouse and *ghagra* got up from a game of *sagargotas* going on in the faint light of an oil lamp in the Middle Room and scampered to him.

"You are going to be married to the Kosambi boy next month. He will not be called Bhomya anymore, but Bapu. Practise wearing the nine yard sari from tomorrow." Kashba informed and instructed.

The girl nodded gravely and went back to her game.

"I am going to be married to Kosambi, Vachhabai's brother," she announced disinterestedly.

"Bhomya. She is getting married to Bhomya," her friends broke out in hoarse laughter.

"Not Bhomya! Bapu!" Bala shrieked and even slapped one of them. She was a firebrand.

TWO

May - June 1891

Bapu found himself in the proverbial position of the camel that had collapsed under the weight of a straw added to the burden on his back. He was filled with soul-wrenching aversion. Already crushed under the weight of undesired family responsibilities, he now went completely berserk when returning home in the evening, he found out that he was now to be saddled with a wife too. Without bothering to consult him, the bride, the wedding date, the list of guests and even the menu for the feasts had been fixed. He just couldn't take it. He locked himself in a room.

When the news of Bapu's unusual behaviour reached Damodarbab he sprinted to the room and began to knock violently on the door.

"Open the door, Bapu! What is the meaning of all this? Why are you sulking on such a joyous occasion?" Damodarbab yelled.

Bapu emerged. He was taller than the average Goan. His tansured head, sad eyes and sunken cheeks made him look scrawnier than he was. But he was wiry. He could climb up tall palms and chase cattle for miles to bring them home. He had not changed out of the crumpled dhoti and shortsleeved undershirt that he had worn in the morning and looked beleaguered. Steeped in obedience and politeness he had no strength to go against his father's dictates. Yet for once he managed to muster a little bit of courage.

"I am dead against child marriages, Baba!" Bapu spoke out, holding Damodarbab's eyes in a level gaze.

"So?" Damodarbab raised his eyebrows. He had been noting for some time that in addition to being an impossible dreamer Bapu was getting to be an opinionated fool too. He had formed opinions on every subject on earth and flaunted them in and out of context. Damodarbab had no objection to this habit, unusual though it was and a waste of time too, according to him. He was happy that even though absolutely unproductive, the pastime was innocuous. Some of his friends were devastated because their sons had become stage actors or taken to drinking or visiting bhavins, the local Devdasis. Dharma had kept away from such gross misbehaviour. In fact he reprimanded others whenever they indulged in such moral lapses even though his reproof fell on deaf

ears. Damodarbab played along analysing Bapu's disproportionate penchant for reading, social reform and contentiousness as evanescent characteristic of his blooming youth. However, he was not going to play into his hands and watch their lives turn topsyturvy due to these so-called social viewpoints.

"So I don't want to get married. I don't want to act against my convictions."

"Boot to your convictions! You have to follow social customs and that's that."

"I don't want to be saddled with the burden of a family before I have become an earning member of the family."

"That might take years and pray how will you find a wife at that late age?" Damodarbab rasped. "Am I not well and kicking and able to look after you all? Have I asked you to earn for all of us? For your information everybody has these newfangled opinions. But no one puts them in practise. This is the right age for marrying and marry you will." Damodarbab had given his solemn word for the marriage. Changing it would be calumny. He would much rather die than commit this social sin

"It is not necessary to do what everyone else is doing," Bapu persisted. But his face was taut, voice shaky, eyes sadder.

"It is. Exceptions and misfits have no place in this world. I am not telling you to do something wrong."

"You are, in a way. This is duplicity. It is wrong to preach one thing and do something else. My motto is 'do as you preach'." Bapu quoted from a religious poem of the saint Tukaram. Such self defense was totally out of character. He had never come up with such gutsiness in anyone's living memory. Conviction that the impending marriage needed to be cancelled at any risk had driven him to speak out. At the same time persistence was taking a toll of his mental strength. The hollows in his thin face had become deeper, his eyes glossy with the onset of anguish. Little did he know that the motto that he had come up with invariably got people in trouble. In fact it had even got the saint himself in trouble during his life time. Damodarbab was just trying to impart him this valuable worldly wisdom, the convenient, even deceptional deviation between the spoken principle and the actual practise. But Bapu would never learn it. The motto would stay with him all his life and land him in trouble.

"It is wrong to get married when you cannot afford it. I want to study Sanskrit." Bapu came up with another weapon of assault, as

ineffectual as the first one.

"This is just what I feared. This foolhardy impulse to be curbed immediately. You are fourteen. Is this the age to pursue meaningless education? Look after the orchard and you will be able to afford ten marriages."

The war raged on and soon became one-sided. Bapu was far too submissive and good-natured to keep it up. He stopped defending himself after a while and acquiesced. But hated himself for it later. His inner turmoil escalated. Though branded a dreamer, he constantly indulged in self-examinations which had exposed the truth that he was an absolute non-achiever and would continue to be one even if he minted money from the orchard. With marriage round the corner now all his chances for making up for the wasted years seemed to be in doldrums. His trauma now grew out of bounds. Amidst all that atmosphere of festivity the bridegroom was the only one who simpered with ill-concealed melancholy and resentment.

Years later he would comment on this state of mind in *Nivedan*, his autobiography:

"My discontent escalated with my reading. Great men like Vishnushastri, Agarkar etc. had rendered immaculate service to the best of their ability. Their achievements were applauded by one and all. Is there the faintest ray of hope that I could be an achiever like them? They were erudites par excellence! They had unparalleled enthusiasm and courage. I am bereft of these precious qualities. Why should a man like me comparable to a beast cling to life? Will it not be better if I drink poison and end my existence? Such dismal thoughts constantly assailed my mind. I did not succumb to them for I did not have the courage to act on them either." (Chapter Two.)

One more reason lurked behind Bapu's misogamism. With the advent of youth he had been buffeted by a maelstrom of unformed but compelling passions and lusts. His friends had been overly enthralled by this blooming of their manliness. Some had even been to Devdasis to confirm its proof. They spoke candidly about their experiences. But Bapu was revulsed. He interpreted these terrible desires as sinful, to be ousted from one's mind at the earliest and at whatever cost. Their onset made him feel shameful. He tried to quash these drives. He could see that marriage would only make this trauma worse. Long before he had familiarized himself with Buddhism he had apparently been mystically indoctrinated in the Buddhist precept of quashing the hungers of the body. However he couldn't bring himself round to saying so.

"The noxious language of my companions did stimulate the onset of unsalubrious ideas in my mind. My upbringing had been highly orthodox, my family having imposed myriad moral strictures on me. I am still suffering from the poisonous outcome of this mental affliction." *Nivedan*, Chapter Two.

If ever the Lauds had found out that the bridegroom they had selected for their sweet little Bala considered the natural hungers of the human body and mind as wrong they would have been brutally shocked and might even have had second thoughts about arranging the match. But nobody had an inkling of Bapu's innate asceticism. The Kosambis as well as Lauds were blissfully unaware of his trauma. They had neither the time nor the insight for mulling over such fine philosophical matters which for Bapu were an indivisible part of reality. Never in the wildest stretch of their fancy could they have figured that Bapu had hated all physical relationships ever since these ideas first bloomed in his young mind.

The wedding was solemnized on the fifteenth of June, 1891, at Chikhali amidst torrential rain, but unceasing enthusiasm. The Kosambis stayed in that green bowl of a village for almost a week and partied to their heart's content on the produce of both land and sea. After the wedding, they brought Bala back with them, kept her for a couple of days, then sent her back to Chikhali.

Bapu felt that the earth had caved in under his feet. The marriage vows aggravated Bapu's torments. He failed to respond receptively to the message to end youthful flippancy (at fourteen!) and take responsibilities head-on. Dictates and teasings to that effect had an absolutely adverse effect on him. His bottled-up turbulence reached a new high. He began to suffer from spasms of palpitations and sighs. Sleptime turned into a nightmare. As an antidote to the malady he began to smoke the *gudgudi*. This was a recommended remedy to all kinds of high undiagnosable maladies, mental and physical. However in Bapu's case it turned out to be absolutely futile. On the contrary it added the pressure of guilt to the stark despair reigning in his adolescent mind already, for inhaling tobacco too was a bad habit. He also took to locking himself in his room and spending long hours in the forests. This was not an onslaught of lunacy. It was the helpless reaction of a young boy stonewalled by the demands of society and family and yet driven relentlessly towards a certain goal, undefined though it was at the time, by a strong inner pull of spirituality.

The family deity Ramnath was enshrined at Bandiwd by the

ancestors of the Kosambis when they had come back to their native country from the state of the Saundekars. On each Dussera day Vetala, another local deity, the god of demons, to be feared and propitiated, entered the priest's body and spoke out the truth and made predictions. Damodarbab had deep faith in both Ramnath and the Vetala. He escorted Bapu to Bandiwe and sought a remedy from the priest who had already become the Vetala. The priest diagnosed that Bapu had been possessed by ghosts as he passed by a cemetery on way to the orchard. He prescribed some holy ashes and *prasad* to drive away the malefactors living in Bapu's body at the time. Bapu was made to swallow these by Damodarbab. The cures effected no change in his state of mind except filling him with disgust. He was as fiercely opposed to superstitions as to child marriages.

The spasms were relentless and so were Damodarbab's efforts to shove this square into the round pegs of a provider and progenitor. For him the orchard had been a grievous comedown.

The Kosambis were originally from the town of Lotli, in Sasashti. They were descendants of the Aryans who had come from the Caucasus Mountain and settled here. One of their ancestors was the treasurer at the office of the local government. Hence their surname Kosambi, a derivative of the Sanskrit word *Koshambhi* meaning treasurer. One of these displaced Kosambis, Vishnu, ventured to Bandiwe and stayed with Nagoji Naik, his mentor. Nagoji Naik got him married to his only daughter and made him his heir. But afterwards when he had four sons Vishnu lost his status of a heir. He moved to Vijapur and found a job at Adilshah's court. One day the Badshah was about to make a wrong move in a game of chess, Vishnu coughed and warned him. Badshah won the game and reciprocated Vishnu's help by giving him the post of the collector of taxes for the district of Antruj on a percentage basis.

Feeling ingratiated to Nagoji Naik, Vishnu gave equal partnership to his wife's brother. He built a house at Agapur near Bandiwe and lived there happily and amidst great wealth. (This house still existed in a dilapidated condition. Bapu frequently visited it). However, in course of time the Kosambis lost their fortune. Ramchandra, Damodarbab's father, had to sell jewellery and even pots and pans to make a living. Finally he took his wife Sitabai Naik Sankhwal and five sons to Sitabai's father's place. Raya, one of her four brothers, had found a supervisor's job at Verne with a Catholic landlord named Gama. The entire family lived with Raya at Verne. A little later Gama signed a contract with the Portuguese government for the revenue of the town of Sankhwal, situated at the mouth of the river Juari. At that time it was barren land. But soon it got inhabited. Raya was assigned the job

of supervising the development and collection of taxes. A little later Raya passed on his assignment to Pundlik, his younger brother, Pundlik in turn put Ramchandra in charge of the place. He himself moved to Dapoli.

Ramchandra leased a coconut orchard independently for himself. This was the orchard inherited by Damodarbab. But it didn't do as well as his father expected. He could barely make two ends meet. He had heard tales of the lost wealth of the Kosambis and longed to have it reinstated by the joint efforts of his sons and himself. Even if Bapu had failed as an achiever in school, Damodarbab had hopes that he would augment the income they eked from the orchard.

But instead of thinking of ways to replenish their meagre income Bapu locked himself in an insular world. He plunged obsessively into his books. Reading became his only escape from a reality he didn't have much love for. He had been confused by the strictures of the society which were at variance with the fomenting urges of his mind. Now he set himself new guidelines drawing conclusions from the books that he read. He visited his friends and relatives only to borrow books from them. He read the Marathi poems of Moropant and Waman, the essays of social reformers like Agarkar and Chiplunkar, the religious poems of saints like Tukaram and a few magazine that were being published in those days. Finally a biography of Sant Tukaram played the role of his saviour.

"The biography of the great saint really gripped me. I read it again and again and even learnt some of the poems by heart. The biography got rid of my disturbance finally. I am aggrieved because I am impecunious. But Tukarambuva had faced a far worse fate, that of bankruptcy. I regret that I am deprived of scholarship. But Tukarambuva had even less ways and means for an education. I am besides myself with anxiety because I am married. But Tukoba had to bear the brunt of two marriages. Tukoba faced invincible difficulties in daily life. Still he reached impeccable heights of spiritual thought. He never considered worldly sorrows as impediments. On the contrary he welcomed them as beneficial. Even though I have failed to beget wealth and knowledge with effort could I not imbibe in my mind Tukoba's virtues? If I fortified my mind with the armour of renunciation of desire and war with the six sins using virtues like truth and loyalty for weaponry I would definitely achieve my goal, I hoped. I didn't yearn for glory or a good reputation. I just craved to be possessed of spirituality like Tukoba. I took to isolating myself and hardening my casual thoughts into staunch determination by practising meditation. This worked. That funny hammering in my head vapourised". *Nivedan*, Chapter Two.

The building up of invincible resoluteness was intended for social and spiritual achievement. It was definitely not focused on turning Bapu into an ideal family man. Still the turmoil abated and he came up with enough patience to await an opportunity for the fulfilment of his inner hungers. He struck some kind of a compromise between the undefined but relentless pressing of his mind for scholarship and asceticism and the call of duty. He could never live happily in the constricted world of the orchard and the family. But he would make life meaningful and worthwhile while he awaited the bigger chance, that for the search for spirituality.

A year after his marriage Bapu's aunt's husband at Lohagad passed away. She had no son, only a daughter who was widowed too. So Ramchandradada had to live with her in order to handle the affairs of her land. This meant that Bapu had to look after the orchard singlehandedly. Bapu did full justice to his duties now unhampered by an inner tussle. But he also stuck to his decision of rendering social and patriotic service. He made a small beginning by using *swadeshi* clothes. Once again this earned him the ridicule of his friends and relatives. He was branded an eccentric and an insensible person. Lovely imported cloth was available in Goa at a reasonable rate. In fact people smuggled it from here to Mumbai because it was cheap. On the contrary the locally made handloom dhotis and other stuff were expensive. Bapu had no business spending money on the rough cloth, people cavilled.

Without paying heed to the criticism Bapu turned his attention to customs that were obviously harmful to the society. But he was a dismal failure in this arena too. In *Nivedan* he writes about one such incident, that of the Shimga (Holi) festival at Jambavli.

The Shimga festival at the temple of Damodar Jambavli was well known for its pomp and grandeur and loved by one and all in Goa. People from all over Goa flocked to it and gave donations. But the maximum brunt was borne by the Saraswat Brahmins and merchants at Madgaon.

The populace there had levied a voluntary excise duty on goods transported to Madgaon. This generated a comfortable fund of seven to eight hundred rupees. Damodarbab too made a contribution of one rupee to this festival. The festival lasted for a whole week; there were free meals for all the visitors, also entertainment and spectacular lighting. In Bapu's opinion the proceedings at the festival had sunk into a moral abyss. Youngsters staged plays and took to drinking in order to perfect their dialogue delivery. Due to the absence of loudspeakers they had to

raise their voices to a cacophonous pitch in order to make themselves audible to the last row. They could do this only with the help of alcohol, atleast such was the belief. The managing committee engaged troupes of notch girls to enhance the pleasure. Free quarters for the devotees turned out to be far too inadequate to accommodate this incredible crowd of connoisseurs that flocked to Jambavli. But this was no problem for them. Some of them willingly found lodging facility at the quarters of the Devdasis that lived there.

In 1893 Damodarbab urged Bapu to attend the festival on his behalf. Bapu had gone there with a band of relatives. But he was shocked to note that not only had they chosen to stay with the Devdasis some of the youngsters consorted with them too. An old Devdasi, the leader of the group, tried to tantalize Bapu with the promise of a night of fun and frolic. He was so disgusted with her obscenities that he walked out of the festival. Never again did he pay that rupee towards the expenses of the festival. He could see that the festival led the youngsters astray in every way. They got into two major vices, drinking and womanizing. They became idlers and waistrels, a drain on society. He was aghast to note that under the name of religion, society was fostering a tradition that had definitely become a social aberration if not downright evil. Bapu made this festival the platform for launching his campaign for social reform. He suggested that the fund collected for the festival be utilised for a more meaningful social purpose, like a school, for instance. But once again, he found his efforts stonewalled by a lack of supportive response from any one. He didn't care. He would side with whatever he felt was right. He did not dither to do so either. But he could see that people were turning away from him. The compromise that he had struck with himself dissipated. The hunger for knowledge catapulted to the forefront. He went back to his insular shell of dejection and despair fostered by his dissatisfaction with himself for not being a reckonable force and with the world around for being a stick-in-morass. No one cared. The smug world of the Goans was just not right for social reform, not from Bapu any way. To them Bapu was a spoilsport.

Bapu could see that he had no chance of being a reformer here. Nor would he ever be in a position to untie the Gordian knot of his family's financial problems. It was best to cut it off and fling it away.

He suddenly took off to Kolhapur to learn Sanskrit at the Mahalaxmi temple.

THREE

1899

Like most large houses in Goa, Kashba's house at Chikhali too had a small multipurpose room. It was a storeroom for extra mats, sheets, pillows, foodstuff, leaf plates, magazines, books and many other things. It was used by the ladies of the house for projects that required peace, concentration and care, quilting, embroidering, pounding the dough for papads, pickling mangoes, etc. Today, on the 23rd of October 1899 the room had been cleared of most of its clutter except for a corded bed. Throughout the night women had been parading in and out of it, talking in whispers. Occasionally these were interjected by moans and a stifled shriek. The men had laid down on their mattresses in their rooms. But they were wide awake and addressed one another across the walls. Finally, in the early hours of the morning, the sharp wail of a baby rose above the muffled whispers in the house.

"There! The Kosambi baby has arrived," Sakharamdada, Bala's elder brother, exclaimed as he sprinted out of his room. He was twenty four. A year older than Bapu. They were very good friends despite the antithetical disparity in their achievements. Sakharamdada had returned from Lisbon in March where he had secured a medical degree. He was the first in Goa to achieve this. Tall, fair, stern, muscled yet benign Sakharamdada had an air of authority about him and stood out anywhere in a crowd.

"It is a girl. Bala is fine," his elder sister Laxmi, married to Janu Shiveshwarkar, informed him. She had come down specially for this happy occasion. Her face indicated that she would have preferred the child to be a boy. But she was not too unhappy. She had heard rumours that Bapu kept running away from the house to study Sanskrit heedless of family responsibilities. The baby offered tangible proof that Bapu had become a wholehearted family man. Laxmi herself had given birth to two sons in this very room which was frequently turned into a labour room. The second one, Anant, lovingly called Antulya or Baba was a toddler. Kashba, the younger sons and the everpresent guest stumbled out of their rooms, gathered in the front verandah and expressed satisfaction over the easy delivery. A stampede started now in the

room, women carrying pitchers of hot water, towels, Bala's clothes and small pieces of burning wood in an iron basin to be placed under the corded bed. The heat exuded by the burning wood, would help Bala get back her strength. At eight in the morning the ladies finished their tasks. They invited Dada to visit Bala. This honour was being bestowed on him because he was a doctor. The others, even their father, would have to wait a while till Bala was rested.

Bala lay supine on the corded bed wrapped warmly in sheets and quilts. The baby was by her side wrapped in a tiny quilt. Kakibai, Bappa's wife, though barely thirteen, was very good at quilting and embroidering. She had been turning out stacks and stacks of them for babies as well as grownups.

Dada picked up the baby. She was beautiful and not too small. She had a thick mop of dark hair and dark glinting eyes like Bala's. Bapu's were slightly lighter.

"It is a girl," Bala muttered, her low jaded voice shaking with undertones of despair. At that point a girl's fate seemed to her to be horrendously tied up with her husband's. If only a girl could be the master of her own destiny!

"So what? Even girls have to go to school and learn something. I will make her a doctor like me. She is beautiful. She is fairer than Bapu and has thick hair like yours," Dada talked in consolatory tones. Of all the siblings he was specially attached to Bala. And Bala alone could reason with him whenever he was offended or angry, which was not infrequent.

"Even if she goes to school she would eventually benefit her husband's family only. She would be in no position to look after me." Hot tears rolled down Bala's pale cheeks. She felt so awfully helpless. The tears were the outcome of the unbearable anguish that had been bottled up inside her during the nine months of the pregnancy. Her life seemed to her totally worthless, marked by gruesome uncertainty, undeserved censure and helpless dependency on her husband.

"At fifteen why should you talk about being looked after by your son? Isn't Bapu there?" Dada patted her brow and comforted her. He checked himself from pointing out that he too was there. He had a roaring practice. But the statement would have rubbed salt over her wounds instead of consoling her. Being supported by one's brother was considered to be the apex of indignity for married women.

"Will he come to see me and the baby?" Bala asked, her tears uncontrolled.

"Ofcourse he will. I will send word to Sankhwal immediately and a basket of goodies. I will offer a big puja to Goddess Satti on the sixth day. We will host a meal for the entire village and also for relatives and friends from Phonda and Mhapsa.

Bala failed to be reassured. Her eyes held Dada's in a level gaze of appeal.

"Have you been hearing snyde remarks about Bapu? Ignore them. He is good. He loves you all. He is trying hard to cope with the situation. He will work harder now that there is an addition to his family. We have all been a little carefree in our young days. But once we got harnessed to responsibilities we never looked back. Bapu has no vices, you know. Isn't that a great asset? Isn't that something to be proud of?" Dada gave an impassioned speech at the spur of the moment. He was Bapu's ally. His boundless love for Bapu made him justify each and every oddity of his nature. During the two years that he had spent at Lisbon he had shed some of his adherence to convention. He understood and respected people's desire for freedom.

"He left us and went to Cochin." Bala could hardly speak. This was but one of the woes that gnawed at her mind day in and day out. There were many more, a hoard of them, at the back of her mind.

One more impulse to take off had gripped Bapu at the end of January during the first week of Bala's pregnancy. Incredulously, he had remained bereft of the glow of excitement which she had begun to experience. More than the snyde remarks of others, this aloofness on Bapu's part had irked Bala. On the earlier occasions when frenzy had gripped him she had not been present at the Kosambi household. But this time, it was she who had to bear its brunt. At fourteen she was pregnant and the head of the household, Damodarbab was too old and Ramchandra was away at Kholgad.

Instead of feeling elated by his impending fatherhood, Bapu had apparently had some kind of a relapse that had made him leave them all and get back to his student days. Bapu had heard of a school at Cochin founded by the Saraswat Brahmins there. He had embarked on a steamer at Murgaoon and disembarked at Mangrul. However, he could not make it to Cochin. Either his money was spent or he had been overcome with repentance. Damodarbab had been ailing at this time. He was in no position to run around looking for Bapu. Anyway he had given up. By consensus all the Kosambis had left the matter of Bapu's irreparable idiosyncrasy in God's hand; Bapu would come back if God willed. No one had the time to go looking for him. And certainly no

one had the power to cure him of his impetuosity. Bala cried her heart out. But that was all. No one was in a mood to sympathize with her either. It was her fault too.

The adventure had been a sad let down for Bapu and sheer hell for Bala. The excruciating panic and anguish in her young mind remained unabated. The Lauds had quickly forgotten the unpleasant interlude.

"Okay, so it happened! But wasn't he back? Did he go to a Devdasi? Did he commit a crime?" They asked Bala, She was fed up with this line of argument. What Bapu's supporters failed to grasp was that the end result was always the same: desertion. The reason behind it didn't matter.

For the women in the Kosambi household *she* was the culprit; *she* was the one who was incapable of keeping her husband to herself. They had concluded that Bapu was not interested in her. Otherwise he would have given up his old ways of running away every now and then in search of education at this late stage in life. They blamed her for not exercising enough pull over him, the pull of love and attraction. Their comments had hurt like thrusts of redhot iron rods.

"You are talking exactly like the others. He would get settled after marriage, you all assured me. But he didn't. First it was Kolhapur, then Gokarna. Then Cochin. He keeps running away. He would take off even now."

"What nonsense! Everybody has these unfulfilled desires. He is perturbed by his lack of education."

"But nobody acts on such perturbations!"

"That is Bapu for you."

"That is because I am not his wife. I am a duty imposed on him. First you said marriage would get rid of all this nonsense. Now they are saying the birth of the child would help. I don't think so. I have no hope." Bala had a flair for precise and deadbeat idiom.

"Don't blabber. You are tired. Have some gruel and go to sleep." Dada consoled Bala for well over half an hour. Bala reigned in her tears just so he should feel better.

The ladies forced her to have some gruel, then admonished her to sleep and left her alone. But sleep eluded her. Her instincts were afire, fears unbridled. Bapu's disappearances had become a legend. They gnawed at her young and scared mind. He had run away to Kolhapur once in 1894. That had been the first external indication to Lauds that everything was not hunkydory. Damodarbab had gone berserk. He went to Madgaon to institute enquiries. But his friends

were as much in the dark as he himself. Luckily for him Bapu came back a week later. He fell at his father's feet and swore never to give in to the impulse again.

"Just think of how much mental and physical stress you impose on me. I am not upto forbearing it," Damodarbab remarked wanly. Old age had robbed him of his sternness.

For the next four years he was true to his words. Ramchandra was away at Kholgad managing the affairs of their aunt and Damodarbab incapacitated. But Bapu managed the orchard singlehandedly and gave proof of his acumen. These were the hardest years. 1896 was marked by a severe drought. The price of rice and other grain and commodities reached an unprecedented high. The next year the monsoon was good. But it brought with it a bout of fatal diarrhoea. Bapu, as the head of the family, had to devote time to nursing the sick. Except for him and two others everybody suffered from excruciating stomach pains and were bedridden. Bapu even cleaned them and washed their clothes and sheets. Nobody could accuse him of not having concern for his family and not sharing responsibility.

Anandibai succumbed to it on the fourth of October that year. She was fourteen when Bapu was born. This was one more crushing blow to Bapu. He had never imagined that he would be so upset by anyone's death. He had been deeply steeped in the Hindu philosophy that death was but a state; it was the departure of the soul for another body. He had always wondered to himself why people mourn a death. Luckily for him he had not expressed these radical views to others. However, now, he broke down completely. This was apparently a shattering revelation that he had not transcended pain and pleasure.

Anandibai's death was followed by one more, that of Sonba Mulgaonkar, Bapu's closest friend. Sonba had been living with his uncle at Lohar Chawl, Mumbai. During a bout of plague in 1897 the family had shifted to Girgaon. But the killer disease followed Sonba there too and took him away. Bapu was so upset that he didn't touch food for many days. Sonba was not only a close friend, he was also a very special person. It was Bapu who had implored his mother to allow him to go to Mumbai for his education, through him Bapu wanted to satisfy his own unfulfilled desire for a worthwhile education. Sonba had proved his worth by clearing three standards in one year. That was an outstanding performance. But now he was gone! The deaths, coming one after another, had dug up Bapu's bedrock piling on him stark despondency.

Then there were the debts incurred by Damodarbab during the drought. Day in and day out their creditors turned up and demanded their repayment. Once again all this brought back his old discontentment with his present life. He wrote down a detailed account of the debts and was left with two rupees in his hands. He did manage to reach Gokarna. But was unable to find means of livelihood. So a fortnight later he was back, his mind riven by remorse and the pain of defeat. He took to spending his nights in the forest. The people now declared openly that he was crazy. The close ones accused him directly of having crossed the borderline of sanity. But he didn't care.

Bala was still living with her parents at Chikhali at the time of his trip to Gokarna. She was grown up enough to form an attachment to her husband and be alarmed by his eccentricity. Once again he had assured them all that this would not happen again, that he would look after them all forever. But by now no one had faith in his assurances, not even Damodarbab.

On 28th of August, 1899 Damodarbab passed away. Luckily for Ramchandradada's children and the inevitable hoard of distant relatives that lived with them, Bala was there now to handle the kitchen and hopefully to keep Bapu within bounds of sensibility. Now that the two people who could knock some worldly ideas into Bapu's weird mind were no more, everybody expected Bala to step into their shoes. The family applied pressure on her to accomplish this, the impossible. If only she could establish some rapport with Bapu she would gladly undertake to do this. But there was none. She felt awfully inadequate and stonewalled.

Oddly, Bapu's impulses to run away were invariably triggered by the enhancement of responsibility. The deaths, the debts and the turmoil in the household should have made him pull up his socks and rage war against all such predicaments. Bala would have loved to be by his side and wage a fight against all odds. But he didn't even try. He just escaped. In January 1899 when Bala was in the first week of pregnancy Bapu had boarded a steamer at Murgaoon and disembarked at Mangrul. He had heard of a school at Cochin and wanted to learn English there. Once again he was back as before. But Bala was shattered. Was this the outcome of her pregnancy? Wasn't he relinquishing his duties? Would he never be involved with her and the baby?

In November 1899 she was back at Chikhali to await the birth of her baby. She was no more the ebullient and extroverted young girl who had gone to live with her husband. Her young heart had become

an unfathomable vortex of vague, undefined fears during the few months she had spent with her husband and his family. In this period of adulthood she had made one vital discovery about her husband; his reactions to mundane matters differed radically from those of others. He rarely attended marriages and festivals. He expressed corrosive opinions which displeased many. He hated visiting the government offices. He was driven to craziness counting the coconuts constantly. He had nightmares of them, he often remarked. He did have a few friends. But generally people made fun of him or even got infuriated by his uninvited advice and suggestions. He had taken to wearing handloom dhotis made in India and become the laughing stock of the entire populace of Goa. Everything that he did or was done to him caused unbearable pain to Bala.

There was one more rancour which Bala had not deemed fit to confide in her parents or brothers. The debts. They preyed on everyone's mind in that household. Bapu had borrowed a large sum from his friend Vishnu Naik and paid off the myriad sundry creditors that visited them day in and day out. However he had been unable to pay off Naik. The debt preyed heavily on his mind and plunged him in abject gloom. Stringent economies were being practised there. Bala, head of that heterogenous family at fourteen, and expected to behave like an expert housewife, was most uncomfortable measuring grain and vegetables and cooking barely adequate quantities so that there were no leftovers. Like the Lauds the Kosambis did not have a food festival every day of their life. They cooked parsimoniously and ate frugally. Nor did they have a battalion of bonded labourers who performed every chore in the house. Light chores were left to the ladies in the household.

On low tide days, for instance, the water in the creek at Chikhali ran out. The creek became a vast expanse of wet, silvery sand alive with fluttering prawns. The entire populace of Chikhali turned out there to catch it and treat themselves to a hearty meal. Holding cane baskets in their teeth and wearing scanty clothes, both men and women walked in the creek doubled over to grasp the prawn and drop it in their baskets. Nature was so bountiful out there that within two or three hours one could catch enough prawns to feed an army, more if one had a strong back. The Lauds didn't have to go themselves. They were willingly given a little share from each basket and that frequently measured to piles and piles. Five to ten women sat in the back verandah working through this pile peeling the prawns. A few more took turns at rotating the huge pestle that could grind eleven coconuts at a time.

Eventually when everyone got done and the coconut and red chilly paste and the prawns were set to cook over the big chulla in an enormous cauldron, it filled the spacious house with a mouthwatering aroma. What a curry it was! Prawns couldn't be any fresher and tastier! Bala couldn't help being nostalgic about such occasions though she had not divulged this to anyone.

In contrast the Kosambis bought measured portion of fish from the bazaar or at the docks. Stretching the little bit of curry cooked in a medium sized saucepan to feed ten to fifteen people in that household was a nerveracking experience. Very often it got over by the time the women sat for their meal. They roasted some dry fish or ate rice with pickled mango. For Bala who had been brought up on a staple diet of thick coconut curries and fried fish, this was a nightmare. She had never complained to anyone for she had been steeped in the traditional philosophy that instructed a girl to live happily under the most tortuous conditions at her husband's place. Yet her child's mind had registered the twinge of deprivations.

The women in the Kosambi household often endorsed the view that the deprivations were Bapu's doing. If Bapu so desired he could upgrade his income and give them all a better life. But, they diagnosed that he didn't want to do this; that his mind was not in his orchard at all, that he was an idler, a man who balked at responsibilities, as close to a good-for-nothing person as one could be. The women would be after Bala to infuse a little worldly wisdom, enterprise and seriousness in her husband. Bala would have loved to achieve this miracle. But she just didn't know how to go about it. Bapu never consulted her or confided anything in her. In fact instinctively she knew that their relationship was bereft of any bonding whatsoever. The tears were mainly for this lack of bonding.

Bapu's goal had been more sharply defined now: gain knowledge of Buddhism, a religion very few had memory of at the time. In 1897 he had read the biography of the Buddha in a issue of *Balbodh*, a magazine for kids. Buddhism with its strictures for renunciation of both desire and duty was antithetically contrary to the insistent demands of contemporary society. The story though intended for kids suddenly captivated Bapu.

"Since then I had formed deep faith in the doctrines of the Buddha. The more I wearied of my householder's duties the stauncher my faith in Buddhism became. I felt that the Buddha was the be-all and the end-all for me," he would write in *Nivedan*, Chapter Four, twenty-

four years later.

This new goal or rather the extension of his earlier one had prompted one more change of character in Bapu. He had not divulged it to anyone. Bala had just guessed it from his casual ramblings. Instinctively he had known that there would be even less sympathizers for his new urge, practically none. He became taciturn, withdrawn. He had far less friends now than before. Long time back he had stopped confiding his innermost thoughts and ideas to the few that remained, probably because they criticized or made fun of his ideas now. Since they were fullfledged and dedicated householders themselves, they expected him to follow suit and had no tolerance for his emancipated thinking. In fact it filled them with disgust and indignation.

"Now I got talking about it to myself. I visualized the icon of the Buddha and got into meditation. I read that biography over and over again. I resolved not to do anything else in life but to devote myself absolutely to the study of the Buddha's philosophy if at all I was destined to live a little longer. I would consider my life well spent, I felt, if ever I mastered the teachings of the Buddha." *Nivedan*, Chapter Four.

Kashba planned a feast for the sixth day puja of the goddess Satwai who was supposed to pile all kinds of disasters over newborn babies if not appropriately propitiated. He had invited all the Lauds at Chikhali and Aroben, the Kosambis ofcourse and quite a few friends and relatives from other villages and cities in Goa. He would host a meal to his bonded labour too on this occasion. However there was an unexpected impediment. A few Lauds visited Kashba as soon as they received the invitation.

"Kashba! Sakham spent two years at Lisbon. He should have performed the purification rite after his return. But he didn't. However it is still not too late. He could do it before the Satwai puja and then we could eat with you to our heart's content," the relatives said. They spoke amicably, yet in a stern no-nonsense tone.

"I will talk to him." Kashba answered noncommittally. He was an avant-garde himself. To have sent a son to a foreign country for education was a great stride.

"Why should I expiate? What sin or crime should I expiate for? Did I do anything wrong? Did I learn to become a bartender? Didn't I slog for a vocation which is for the good of everyone in Goa? I refuse to go in for such bunkum. I have treated more than a hundred patients in the past seven months. No one asked me to purify myself. I don't

consider myself impure," Dada yelled in a shrill voice darting out of his room, eyes rolling, lips set in an angry pout. He was extremely fair and far more muscled than the rest of the Lauds who were small-framed and delicate. He became red in the face now and began to fume.

"Dada! Be reasonable. Why do you want to blow up a simple issue? All you have to do is to go to a temple and spend a few minutes of your time. Surely this is not strenuous? Whether you have faith in the rite or not you still have to perform it because such is the commandment of Hinduism," the cousins tried to reason with Dada. It was customary to impose strict ostracization on people who had broken taboos like crossing the ocean. Kashba had backed out of the discussion. He was exceedingly proud of his son and supported him wholeheartedly.

"How could you say this is an innocuous issue? It is akin to declaring myself a sinner. If I sin I will go before God and ask for forgiveness. If I have done a good deed I will not bow before anyone. This is an outmoded custom. I am not the only one who has crossed the ocean. Many are doing it and for a good cause too. The so called purification rite that you recommend makes no sense for there is no impurity involved," Dada fumed. In the two years that he had spent at Lisbon Dada had become a liberated thinker. Religious dictates that couldn't withstand the test of reason made no sense to him and he couldn't get himself to adhere to them simply because they had been laid down in some ancient times and a few obdurate people stuck to their blind observance.

"Dada! We repeat that you are unnecessarily stimulating a controversy. Your perspective is bound to destroy the harmony that reigns here right now. For heavens' sake do not take matters of religion lightly," the visitors remarked giving him as overt a warning as they could summon the courage for, then left fuming and fretting.

"I don't think they would honour our invitation. Go easy on the quantities. We do not want the food to be wasted," was Kashba's only comment.

Inside the house Vainibai, Dada's sixteen year old childless wife, began to sob loudly. She was overly sensitive and prone to bouts of depression. She had spent the two years that Dada was at Lisbon crying her heart out. Dada had consummated the marriage and left for the intended medical course. Now he was back. But she was still childless. There was time enough to have children, the others kept telling her. But she was inconsolable. Besides, she had a compulsively despondent

frame of mind and she clutched at the most trivial event to sulk. Her parents and brothers evinced very little interest in her mental state. They had got her into a good family and it was between her and God to be happy there, they reasoned.

The visitors carried out their threat. They got a written ordinance from a Swami declaring ostracization of Dr. Sakham Laud and everybody who ate or lived with him. They dropped a copy of the diktat over the front verandah.

"We will cook only for the Kathkaris and ourselves. No one else will turn up, for if they do they would be ostracized themselves," Kashba said. He didn't worry about the ostracization. He had more than enough land and labour to feed his family. Ostracization would have no adverse effect on his family.

Bapu, the reform lover, did not care for the ordinance. He too was opposed to all outmoded and meaningless rituals. He turned up with two friends the day before the Shashti puja. He had been opposed to many religious customs which were obsolete or twisted into bacchanalia. This was a good opportunity for him to openly defy a custom that should have been given up by consensus.

"The girl is so pink! Let us call her Manik, ruby," Bapu suggested.

So Manik she was, Manak in local parlance which was Konkani.

"We will see that she gets a good education. I want her to be a doctor," Dada confided. He was a very loving person and longed to have a child himself.

"For that her father has to be educated first," Bapu mulled.

As expected none of the Lauds or other upper caste residents of Chikhali turned up for the puja. The priest, Narshabhat too was conspicuous by his absence. None of the hosts missed any of them. Dada performed the puja himself. There was food galore and the Kathkaris enjoyed it, vegetarian though it was. The ordinance did not touch them in any way. They themselves had been ostracized since birth. Hinduism did not take their cognizance at all. There were no rules nor any provisions for them.

The next day they found yet one more ordinance on the front verandah. It was in the name of Bapu, his friends and Bappa, Kashba's second son who had been to a Medical school in Panaji and become a doctor. The two friends were panic stricken. They made a beeline for the nearest temple and absolved themselves of the sin of having had a meal with Dr. Sakham Laud. Bappa and Bapu did not budge. The

ostracization did not affect the practises of Bappa and Dada, both of whom were good doctors and extremely kindhearted souls. But Dada got fed up of his cousins and opened a dispensary in Mhapsa. Mhapsa was a city. The urbanized people there did not lay stress on such outmoded religious practices. They flocked to Dada's dispensary.

For Bapu it was a different story. The news of the ostracization had travelled to Sankhwal with uncanny speed. Ramchandra, Bapu's elder brother and other relatives dreaded the wrath of the community. They pressed Bapu to go in for the purification ceremony. They didn't throw him out of the house for he was its head. But no one ate with him. Staunch friends like Vishnu Naik too refused to have him inside their houses and give him a meal. He felt hounded and justifiably so. He couldn't take it any more. This was the last straw that broke him completely. The inner discontent he had been trying to bury under the call of duty erupted all of a sudden. He had no thoughts for his family and the infant Manik. He had thoughts only for his own betterment and his longing to study Buddhism. Right now he was a nonentity. Unless and until he became somebody he couldn't live life the way he wanted to. On the second of December he boarded a train for Pune, a pot, a mat and a couple of sets of clothes, his only baggage.

FOUR

1900

A week after Bapu's departure there was still no sign of message or a return. Ramchandradada was panic stricken. He wondered if this time Bapu had left for good, unassailed by guilt. He was at Kholgad as usual. But his sons were grown up now, twelve and thirteen. When they didn't see Bapu for two days they began a hunt for him. Vishnu Naik informed him without any discernible twinge of guilt, that he had visited him, but had been refused entry into the house. They had a sister at Malawli who sent word that he had spent a night with her. But more than this she didn't know. He wasn't at Chikhali. Finally they met someone who had seen Bapu board the Pune bound early morning train at Madgaon.

Ramchandradada was livid. Sheer gut instincts warned him that this time Bapu's departure had not been prompted by this usual shortlived flash-in-the-pan impulse, but seemed to be the outcome of an inviolable command from deep inside of him triggered by the episode of the ostracization. Ramchandradada embarked on a steamer, got down at Betim and walked to Mhapsa.

"What glad tidings bring you here? I hope you are not unwell," Dada asked jocundly.

"Bapu is gone," Ramchandradada could hardly breathe due to a spasm of escalating fury.

"Gone? Where? Do you mean to say that he is upto his old ways? You should really knock some home truths into his wandering mind, you know. Everybody has unfulfilled desires. No one chases them once they are married," Sakharamdada answered irately. "Even his best friends Vishnu and Bhiku Naik refused to have him inside their house and serve him food by their side. This was not only ignominy, he felt terribly lonely."

"You should have supported him. You should have argued on his behalf. If his friends deserted him for such a trivial a reason they were not worth calling friends." Dada was furious too. Ramchandradada had gone to Dada to request help in locating Bapu and also to make it clear that he would take care of Bala and the baby even in Bapu's absence. But now he found himself getting embroiled in an unforeseen tiff.

"We did support him by allowing him in our house," He snapped.

"His house," Dada hastened to point out bluntly. "But you were probably hounding him for getting that purification ceremony done."

"We were. We are ordinary people. We want to live peacefully in this world. We do not want to alienate anybody."

"Shouldn't we the elites, people with the foresight for reform and progress come up with the courage to do so? Shouldn't we live fearlessly?"

"We cannot afford reform. Reform takes the toll on many things. We are not ready for such sacrifices."

"What sacrifices? I have not sacrificed anything. These are but silly fears, they are the outcome of your overworked imagination. Bapu showed impeccable courage. You should have appreciated his decision. He cannot live in a wrong world. He has to set it right even though in a small way."

"This is easier said than done. You filled his weak mind with such counterproductive jargon and he took off. Who is going to look after the orchard now? Who is going to support the family? Pay off the debt? Why did you have to be so obstinate? You are a doctor. You could get away with murder, for people need you. Such is not our case. We exercise no clout over people. Bapu realised this. He kept commenting on it."

"Is it my fault that the people need me and forgive my so called lapses? You should not have let him go. What about my sister? The month old baby?"

"What about us? We got unwittingly victimized. We got slaughtered on the block of your thoughtlessly avant-garde and reformist ideas!"

Teeth bared and brows crumpled, the two Dadas had a vicious fight. Dada had decided not to confide in Bala about the alarming event. This was not the first time Bapu had run away from home. This had become some kind of a habit. But the fact to remember was that he always came back.

But when there was no sign of Bapu even after a fortnight Dada had no choice but to put Bala abreast of the crushing news, one that she with her insight into his character had always dreaded. It was better that she found out this from a sympathizer like him than from the wagging tongues of gossipmongers.

Bala had been querying about Bapu all these days. She wanted them to send word to him and get him over to see her and the baby.

When Dada informed her that he had gone to Pune to learn Sanskrit from Dr. Bhandarkar she broke down completely and began to howl with anguish. With the sword of the ostracization still hanging on their friends' and relatives' heads there was nobody left to visit and console them. Pachubai, Dada, Bappa his fourteen year old wife Kakibai and younger brother Mangu and Jagu spent hours trying to put some order into her devastated mind. She had broken down completely. Desertion by the husband was a horrendous and most feared fate for a wife.

"Why do you cry, Bala? He is bound to come back. He always does. What can he learn at twenty three? And who will teach him? It is a dream, that's all. I will have a talk with him when he comes back. I should have done it earlier. But I never imagined that after the arrival of the baby he would still be governed by his old cravings," Dada stated. His anger had been directed as much at himself as at Bapu.

After a long time Bala nodded. The heartache remained but she was a little bit less desolate for she had seen the light at the end of the tunnel.

She sent word to Narshabhat and got him over. He was the family priest of the Lauds. Even though he had not turned up for the puja fearing the wrath of the rest of the Lauds, he couldn't afford to lose all that business permanently. He visited Bala surreptitiously in the convenient hour of the morning when the men were visiting their fields and the women working in the kitchen.

"What is it Balabai?" Narshabhat queried. He had already prophesied that the girl would have a good life.

"She would eat from silver plates. She would have elephants, in her stable. She would be highly educated too," he had said.

"Bapu has left us again," Bala appraised him. She did not sob. Her voice rang with steely determination.

"Again? Where? Why?" exclaimed the priest. Everybody was familiar with Bapu's bouts of escapism.

"To Pune. I don't know exactly why. He had been talking of Buddha for some time. However that is not the point. Take this." Bala pushed a hand inside the folds of her nine yard sari and whisked out a rupee. "Find a good godman. Get him to perform some black magic. These bouts have got to vanish. They are the outcome of somebody's black magic. You have to undo its malicious effect."

"I will do that, rest assured." Narshabhat never turned down a request or an instruction.

"The tantrik has to bring him back and see that he never leaves

Manik and me again. He is good. He is really attached to us. But some wicked and jealous people are working against our interest."

"I know a good tantrik at Kamurlee. I have not known him to fail a single time. Bapu will be back in a week, I assure you." Narshabhat grabbed the rupee, tucked it in the folds of his dhoti and departed.

Bala smiled contentedly. She had taken care of her future.

Dr. Bhandarkar, internationally renowned Indologist, had built a spacious house by the confluence of the rivers Mula and Mutha at Pune. As it sailed into Bapu's vision his heart began to swell with a myriad happy emotion: joy, exultance, pride, incredulity and all the nuances in between. Three or four years back he had got hold of a Sanskrit grammar written by Dr. Bhandarkar in Marathi. The grammar was also available in English. But Bapu had no use for it since he hadn't progressed beyond a perfunctory knowledge of the English alphabet. However he had read the Marathi edition over and over again and read a few parts of Kalidasa's *Raghuvamsha* based on that precious grammar. He had also learnt a few verses of that epic by heart. Since then he had considered Dr. Bhandarkar as his guru and had been hero worshipping him. However, never in his wildest light of imagination had he envisioned a meeting with his guru.

Suddenly ten days after his arrival at Pune, Bapu had discovered that Dr. Bhandarkar had retired and settled in Pune. Was he exulted! Finding his address was very easy and there he was, trudging along the river bank from Sadashiv Peth where he had been staying with Ramkrishna Redkar, a Goan who had settled in Pune.

Leaving home was a poignant experience. His mind was buffeted by the pull of responsibilities he had left behind unattended. The familiar frenzy to get out off the train and go back had gripped him. However this time he was fully prepared to overcome it. His newfound resoluteness helped to quash the rebounding impulse. With a little effort he found Redkar's house and the latter welcomed him very warmly.

Bapu had no precise plan of action. Vaguely he had planned to look for a job and learn Sanskrit from a Shastri in his leisure hours. Redkar was in a position to find him a job in the police department. But Bapu was stubbornly opposed to this particular profession. Desperate though he was for a job he still clung to whatever opinions he had built up in the course of his reflections. He had come with the twenty five rupees Kashba had given him as a gift on the occasion of the sixth day puja of Satwai. The money should last him for a couple of months. So

he was in no hurry to get into a situation that might prove to be worse than the one he had left behind and be counterproductive to his intentions too. He had been considerably heartened by the information about Dr. Bhandarkar. In some mystic way this good news had been to him an indication that he was on the right track and that for once destiny was helping him achieve his goal.

Dr. Bhandarkar was born on the 6th of July, 1837 at Malwan. He had secured an M.A. from the Elphinstone College, Mumbai, in English and Sanskrit. He had also studied Sanskrit the traditional way from the Shastris at Pune and Mumbai. He had been a professor of Sanskrit at Deccan College, Pune, till his retirement in 1896. He had attended Oriental Conferences at Vienna and London and had written many papers and books in English and Marathi on a variety of subjects related to Indology, religion and reform. Social subjects that were closest to his heart were; ban on child marriages, widow remarriage, eradication of untouchability, drinking, and the system of Devdasis. He had launched acerbic attacks on these social evils in newspapers. Despite the disparity in their ages and backgrounds Dr. Bhandarkar seemed to be a soulmate for Bapu. (Dr. Bhandarkar would rise to even greater heights in the near future. In 1903 he was made the member of the Viceroy's Legislative Council. A year later he was the Vice Chancellor of the Bombay University. For the next five years he was the member of many reputed international organizations; Royal Asiatic Society, Imperial Akademi Of Science, Petersburg, German Oriental Society, American Oriental Society, Asiatic Society, Italy, etc. He founded the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute at Pune on the occasion of his 80th birthday.)

The reason for the scholar's early retirement was that he had become a very active member of the Prarthana Samaj, a recent modernized and reformed version of Hinduism. There were many more in those days including the Arya Samaj and Brahmo Samaj. Bhandarkar absolutely endorsed the philosophy and viewpoints of the Prarthana Samaj. He was a very fine orator and preached the gospels of the new religion from its pulpit. The Samaj was deadly opposed to segregation. It encouraged men and women to mix freely and listen to sermons or sing *bhajans* or participate in discussions about social and religious subjects in a hall rented for such get-togethers. The walls of the hall were bereft of pictures of gods and goddesses unlike other sacred places of the Hindus, for the Samaj was opposed to idol worship. They were bedecked with pictures of flowers or scenes of Nature.

Bal Gangadhar Tilak's *Kesari* had launched a tirade against the

Prarthana Samaj and Dr. Bhandarkar too, claiming that it was Christianity dressed shoddily as neo-Hinduism. But Bhandarkar had retaliated with a series of equally acerbic articles and refuted the accusation.

Bhandarkar was working in his study. The discipline of the household demanded that each visitor be announced before he was ushered to the scholar's study. Bapu scribbled his name on a piece of paper, then on a sudden impulse quoted a verse from Tukaram's *Abhangas* which ran as follows:

"Lord! You are a pool of happiness! Hence I dare to confide my wish unto you. I desire to have this much closeness to you. Please bear with me."

Bhandarkar was duly impressed. He had Bapu brought to his study immediately. No two men could have offered a greater contrast. Dr. Bhandarkar, sixty two, moustachioed, bespectacled, authoritative, ramrod straight dressed immaculately in trousers, long coat, *pagdi*, *uparna* and shoes; Bapu twenty four, scrawny, confused, shoulders caved in and dressed gawkishly in coarse dhoti, crumpled shirt and thick chappals of untanned leather. Still, the two got along like two long lost chums. Bhandarkar paid a compliment to Bapu's mastery over Marathi. He had not expected such flair of a Goan, he said and asked searching questions about his life and ambitions. Bapu was overjoyed by the warmth that he could feel exuding from Bhandarkar. Finally after many disappointments and abortive efforts he had got on the right track, he reflected to himself.

"You will have to put in seven years if you want to study Sanskrit properly," Bhandarkar stated. He was known for not mincing his words. "If you are not encumbered by family responsibilities you don't have to look for a job. There are many Saraswat Brahmins in Pune. They will help you to the extent of five to six rupees a month."

"I have no responsibilities. My wife and daughter are being well looked after by her father and doctor brothers. Our orchard is being managed by my brother's sons." Bapu was making a statement of facts, one that had helped him quell his own twing of conscience.

Bhandarkar directed Bapu to Vasudevshastri Abhyankar's Sanskrit Pathashala. There he was assigned to Mahadevshastri Joshi for studying Patanjali's *Siddhanta Kaumudi*, a very difficult Sanskrit grammar based on Panini's *Ashtadhyayi*. Bapu was reassured now that he had finally tumbled on an appropriate plan of action. He figured that with Dr. Bhandarkar's guidance and financial help he would soon become a Buddhist scholar. He had made up his mind to get back to

his family responsibilities only after he achieved this. In a mood of exuberant joy and confidence he bought half a dozen postcards and wrote letters to Ramchandradada, Sakhamdada and other friends, even Vishnu Naik whose ostracization he had now graciously forgotten. These had been casual letters informing them that he was doing well. He had not offered any apology for not having had the courtesy to bid proper adieu before leaving them. He had chosen to be reticent about that part of his life. The postcard was intended to hint that he had not cut himself off from the family fold, that he intended to get back eventually after his mission was accomplished.

Bapu had addressed Dada's postcard to his dispensary, for it would take ten more days to reach Chikhali, Dada was happy to read its contents. He noted that Bapu had offered no apology for having upped and gone. In fact he had been absolutely silent on the topic. He had referred to his meeting with Dr. Bhandarkar and the subsequent arrangements made by him for Bapu's education. 'Typical Bapu!' Dada reflected to himself. 'He would always do whatever he wanted to do and no apologies.'

He got up at four a.m. on Saturday and walked the six miles to Chikhali in pleasantly cool air and under a beautiful starlit sky wearing a dhoti and locally made chappals. At the dispensary he was invariably dressed in trousers, shirt, long coat and pointed pump shoes. But for trekking long distances he preferred *swadeshi*. The household was up and expecting Dada. Men had had their baths and were doing their accounts on the front verandah. The women were stirring gruel and boiling milk in the kitchen. The bonded people were cleaning the cowpens. Bala was in the Middle Room forlornly grating coconuts and distraughtly, her fingers. There were whispers in Chikhali — in fact all over Goa — that Bapu had deserted her and the baby. No one dared to confront her and ask pointblank. Still Bala could not help sensing the rumours. This had elevated her anguish to the level of a nervous breakdown. It was a wonder that she somehow found the courage to look after the baby. She had not failed to summon Narshabhat and express strong disapproval about the inefficacy of the tantrik's measures.

"Things are not worse only because of his measures. Right now he has turned black to grey. Turning black to white would need a little more time," the priest had answered without batting an eye lid. He was an expert at evading traps and accusations. Bala had not swallowed his explanation. But her faith in the powers of a tantrik remained unchanged. Narshabhat had just not been able to find the right tantrik she said to

herself. By now her brothers had found out about Narshabhat's visits. But they played along telling themselves that but for this belief in getting her destiny turned around with help from a tantrik, Bala might become absolutely crazy, that it was her belief in the occult that was somehow keeping her hope alive and sustaining her sanity.

Manik who was three months old had just learnt to turn. She was giving a performance on a mat nearby. She was a chubby baby, her complexion, a glowing pink and face, perfectly round, framed by thick black curls.

"Bala! Come, there is a letter from Bapu," Dada said to her, continuing to walk to the front verandahs. Bala got up and ran after him. Kashba, Bappa, Jagu and Mangu had just finished their gruel session and were ensconced on mats spread on the front verandah. The verandah looked kind of bleak, bereft of the usual crowd of daily visitors. Their local cousins who had taken the initiative in procuring the ordinance for ostracization had disappeared, even Ladudada. But Kashba and his sons did not care. They had friends elsewhere who were not affected by this matter. Bappa had a dispensary at Phonda. He had bought some paddy fields there too. The others too were repenting that ordinance now. But having once taken an aggressive stand they were reluctant to retract it. That unpleasant episode had disrupted the companionable harmony that had reigned at Chikhali earlier. Eventually the other Lauds would leave Chikhali unable to bear the closure of communication between them and Kashba's family.

Dada's arrival acted like sunshine on a dismal rainy day.

"Dada? Thought it was you. But this is too early for you," Kashba remarked. Normally Dada arrived around ten in the morning.

"I left early, for there is a letter from Bapu."

"Is there? Good! This means he has not disappeared from our lives." There were shrieks of joy from everyone. Bapu's sudden and unannounced departure had set everyone worrying about his intentions. Their opinion was that Bapu would be upto anything.

Dada read the card:

"I have started to read the *Kaumudi* with Mahadeoshastri. But can't follow it yet. However, I can read the *Raghuvamsha* very well, I am having my meals at a boarding house. But the owner charges me a little extra for I am a Saraswat. However, my finances have been taken care of. Dr. Bhandarkar had promised to find me some aid. How are you doing? I am keeping good health. Blessings to Bala and Manik."

"What food would he get at the boarding?" Bala sobbed.

However, she had been made somewhat happier by the postcard. Desertion for whatever reason was social hell.

"That is his own doing. We didn't send him there. He went of his own accord." Kashba rasped. He was crushed by the unexpected turn of events. People blamed him now for not having made a good choice of a groom for Bala. He couldn't help remembering Sadba's words that on a beautiful day, like the one they had chosen to visit Damodarbab, on absolutely nothing could go wrong. Apparently Nature had been very deceitful on that day.

"Bapu has not washed his hands off you and Manik. He would finish his study and come back. This is no crime. It has been done before in the ancient times. There are stories of students wandering around in search of a guru," Mangu averred. Even though he was only thirteen and a nonshiner at school unlike his two elder doctor brothers, Mangu too was fond of reading and was fast developing an entertaining style of conversation punctuated with quotations, songs and stories. They all grinned. Mangu had spoken for them all. They would use this irrefutable line of argument to counter calumnious attacks by the gossipmongers.

"I sent him a money order of ten rupees at the address of the Prarthana Samaj," Dada informed.

"You did? He would stretch that money to last him for months. The money would delay his return!" Bala wailed.

"It is better that he fulfills his desire once and for all. Those constant sorties are not good for anyone."

A debate started now about the wisdom of having sent that money.

"Look! He wants us to know that he has not left his family and run away. We have to let him know that we do not hold a grouse against him. We also have to see that he lives in comfort. The Kosambis are in no position to help him. Their debts are piling up. By the grace of God we are in a position to help. Should we not do so?" Dada yelled and that put an end to the discussion.

"Mangu! What is *Kaumudi*? And what is *Raghuvamsha*?" Bala asked after she read the card herself two or three times.

"*Kaumudi* is a Sanskrit grammar. *Raghuvamsha* is a long poem written by Kalidasa, the same fellow who wrote *Shakuntala*," Mangu was quick with an answer. Kalidasa's play had been translated by Annasaheb Kirloskar in Marathi and had been staged at Panaji. Mangu had seen it.

"How do you know?"

"Bapu told me. What else? He has a copy of *Raghuvamsha* with him. He constantly reads it and has learnt some of the verses by hearts."

The next week Kashba sent Bala and Manik to Sankhwal. He had already patched up the tiff that Dada had had with Ramchandradada. They belonged to the same community, had been good friends and had now been joined in a matrimonial relationship. It would not be right to let the tiff harden into a feud. Kakibai stitched one more stack of quilts and baby frocks for Manik. Kashba bought four saris and six Choli pieces for Bala. There were the customary food hampers too.

This time Bala was placed in charge of all the chores in the kitchen. She was good at cooking, but poor at home economies. Yet somehow she taught herself to measure all the groceries before using them. From fifteen the number of cows in their pen had dwindled down to four in the past six years. After Bapu started managing the orchard there was no one to look after the cattle. This meant there was barely enough milk for daily use. In fact at times Bala had to dip into her own money given to her by her father and buy milk for Manik. Still she did not mind. She knew that she would have to live here in tight circumstances. What she couldn't stand was Bapu's constant derogation by the neighbours and the guests.

"Is this the age to go to school? He should have done it when he was younger. It was not right on his part to take off and to leave us all in such dire circumstances. We had not expected this of Bapu for he was always talking about right and wrong." The women's tongues wagged constantly. They were not always sly. Often they were just venting the thoughts that were uppermost in their minds. Bala never failed to defend her husband. Since the age of seven when her father had informed her of her engagement to the Kosambi boy she had naturally slipped into the role of the ideal wife and a defender of his image.

"My father and brother don't mind. They think he left for a good cause," she rasped.

"They would. They didn't suffer any because of his departure," pat came the rejoinder pushing Bala further into her hell.

Bapu read the *Kaumudi* with Joshi for nearly two months without absorbing a word. For somebody who had practically no schooling, making a lunge for this extremely advanced Sanskrit grammar was a foolhardy venture. Bapu began to have second thoughts about the

sagaciousness of his plan. Only the thought that Bhandarkar had promised him a job made him stick to the incomprehensible lessons. In the meanwhile his reading, voracious as ever, continued undaunted. He didn't have to undertake a tortuous search for books. They were easily available. Pune was the cultural and educational capital of Maharashtra pulsating with all kinds of reforms and allied activity. He could lay his hands on an uninterrupted supply of books.

One day Bapu happened to procure a copy of Govind Narayan Kane's biography of Buddha. Once again he was swept off his feet by the book. It fanned his longing to study the great religion in original. Now he didn't want to waste any more time living in uncertainty. He had often planned to remind Bhandarkar of his promise. But a slight illness on the latter's part had thwarted his plans. Very soon he paid him a visit and broached open the subject.

"I had expected you to be a member of the Prarthana Samaj. If you work as a missionary of the Samaj, the Samaj would foot the entire expenditure for your education," Bhandarkar said.

Bapu was stunned. There had been no talk now of finding some money for Bapu from the well-to-do Saraswat Brahmins of Goa settled in Pune. Bhandarkar, it seemed, wanted to strike some kind of a deal with him, make him a missionary of the Prarthana Samaj and give him a salary which he could use to pay for his education. It was not a bad proposal. But he could see that he would sidetrack him from his set goal. So, at the risk of annoying a great man like Dr. Bhandarkar, he chose to stick to his resolution of not chasing money and not striking any compromise for its sake.

"I adore the philosophy of the Prarthana Samaj. My viewpoints concur most of the doctrines of the Samaj. However, so long as I have not probed into the gospels of the Buddha I am unwilling to accept the membership of any other religion. Right now I am of the opinion that Buddhism alone is the key to the progress of humanity."

Bhandarkar found Bapu's forthrightness irritating and ill placed.

"And pray, on what do you base this assumption of yours?" he queried with biting sarcasm.

"I have read the fascinating biography of Buddha written by Kane."

"That is a poor translation of Sir Edwin Arnold's *The Light of Asia*. Kane hasn't managed to incorporate even a quarter of the sweetness of the original. And on such a book you are basing your ambition?" Bhandarkar's invective was relentless.

Bapu was equally undaunted.

"If the fractional sweetness has enchanted me to such a great extent how much spellbound will I be when I read Buddhism in the original?" he asked, seeking to justify his ardour. It was 'when', not if. He had no doubts that he would do it some day.

"For the study of Buddhism you will have to go to Nepal or Ceylon. There is no provision for this at Pune," Bhandarkar snapped.

"I will go. I don't care if I have to face limitless perils," Bapu answered, uncowed.

Dada's money-order took more than a month to reach Bapu. As Dada had stated, that money signified more than buying power to him. It meant the support of the Lauds to his plan of action. It brought Bapu the solace of knowing that Dada, his staunch friend, probably the only one left, had no grouse against him. The thought took a heavy weight off his saddened heart. Ramchandradada had not sent any money- he was in no position to do so. However, he too had sent a reply and indicated his good feelings. His guilt now abated, Bapu once again got back to the plan he had pushed to the background to visit Nepal. With the ten rupees that he had with him now he could make some headway. His initial fund of money was almost over. He was now absolutely fed up of his life in Pune. The aid promised had apparently been tied up with a condition which came into conflict with his intentions. Not only was he not lured by it, he had been grossly disillusioned by that offer. After two months of rigorous application he was still unable to make head or tail of the *Kaumudi*. And he hadn't got any nearer his goal of reading the Buddha's doctrines in the original. With those ten rupees in hand the future opened up before him. He would head for Nepal, he decided, the one country that Dr. Bhandarkar had stated would help him study Buddhism.

He borrowed twelve rupees from Redkar, got the peon at the Prarthana Samaj to procure for him two orange coloured Kaftans, chopped off his tonsured knot of hair and boarded an Indore bound train.

There was no guilt nor a scintilla of apprehension in his mind, only determination. He was not running away this time. But leaving for the achievement of his goal with the blessings of his friends and relatives.

FIVE

20th September 1900 - 2nd February 1902

"I have already stated that I left Pune on an Amawasya day... My mind was filled with nothing but darkness. However, an optimistic thought did trickle through here and there like rare stars in a cloudless sky, I realized that I had undertaken a foolhardy adventure. I knew also that success in my present undertaking was next to impossible. Still I reckoned that if I struggled hard with unflinching determination I could gain some knowledge of Buddhism in this life. I derived satisfaction from the consolatory thought that my adventure was not prompted by selfishness, that it was not akin to one undertaken by thieves. Even if death overtook me before I could get anywhere I couldn't care less; for I could claim that I had endeavoured to the best of my ability, that I had performed my duty. This solace would definitely allow me to die in peace, I felt," *Nivedan*, Chapter Seven.

A horrendous news reached the Kosambi family in the month of March 1900: Bapu had become sanyasi. Raghu Kamat had seen him board a Northbound train at Pune wearing an orange Kaftan. His knot of tonsured hair had been chopped off and he didn't seem to be wearing his sacred thread. The report implied that Bapu had shaken off his responsibilities towards Bala and Manik, that those postcards didn't mean anything so far as these two were concerned. It was a catastrophic news. Still Ramchandradada was in no mental condition to react to it. He had never really pinned his hopes on Bapu's return and eventual help. Something had snapped within him after Bapu's sudden departure and more particularly after his fight with Dada. That had been the last fight of his life. After that he had been completely drained of the spirit to take the vicissitudes of life head on.

Bala was at Sankhwal now managing the Kosambi household and training the teenager wives of Ramchandradada's two sons. Still, the camaraderie that had once bonded the Kosambis and the Lauds was dissipated. Bapu's disappearance from their lives had made both parties irate, anguished and angry and raised an invisible wall between the two families. They had very little love and understanding to give to one another.

Ever since Anandibai's untimely death Ramchandradada himself had been losing the nerve to cope with the stress that had been buffeting

them for some years. After Bapu's departure he crumbled completely. He still played along managing the orchards at Kholgad and Sankhwal. But was a spent force. He had been drained of the strength, and worse, the desire to wage a war against adversity and come up a winner.

Due to Ramchandradada's lassitude the news turned quickly into malicious gossip. Before it could reach the Lauds in some tactful way it got imparted to Bala in an unforgivably brutal fashion. They had all been invited to a namekeeping ceremony by their neighbours. Bala was not only fond of such outings, she made it a point to attend all such functions and take the opportunity to assert her status of a *suwasini*, a happily married woman. In a tacit way her presence on such occasions drew attention to the fact that Bapu had not deserted her and helped quash ugly rumours that all was not well with her marriage. But now as she changed into her purple jari sari two or three women rushed into her room.

"Are you going to attend the function?"

"Certainly." Bala clanged the thick gold bangles that she wore for social functions.

"Are you allowed to?"

"What do you mean? Bapu is gone for a few months only to study Sankrit. How many times should I explain this to you?" Bala was fast turning into a snappy woman.

"We don't know if sanyasi's wives are allowed to attend. We have to consult a swami."

"Sanyas? Bapu has not taken sanyas!"

"Yes. He has. Raghu Kamat saw him at the Pune station wearing the garb of a sanyasi."

Bala broke down. She didn't attend the function. She sent word to Kashba the very next day to take her away. Kashba was flabbergasted. He could not imagine what worse calamities could have befallen his daughter. He spent a sleepless night and was at Sankhwal a little after eleven a.m. Bala had packed and was impatient to get back to Chikhali, the only place that would protect her from snyder attacks. No one at Sankhwal pressed her to stay. Her nephews were too young and the women distant relatives. Like Ramchandradada they too had become passive, not bothering to control the force of circumstances. They listlessly accepted whatever fate had in store for them. Anyway even had they been tough fighters they would not have got anywhere by keeping Bala with them.

Bala sobbed all the way to Chikhali. Kashba didn't halt at Mhapsa

but sent word to Dada with a man who disembarked at Betim and was walking to Mhapsa. Dada turned up the very next day. He was more livid than confused for they all blamed him now for having given his blessings in the form of that money order.

"Dada! Whether this is real sanyas or not, we think the time has come to give a straight talk to Bapu. There is no point in pampering him any further. He has had his fling. He studied for two months. Now he has to come back and cater to his family," Kashba enjoined.

"I will write him a letter," Bala sobbed.

"See that he gets back,"

"I will," Dada promised. But his words sounded hollow to himself.

At Mhapsa he contacted Raghu Kamat and probed him for further details. The information given by the latter further devastated him. Apparently Dr. Bhandarkar had offered Bapu a good job and he had turned it down.

"Baba! Can you believe it ? Bhandarkar whom Bapu reveres like God Almighty had offered him a missionary's job. But he turned it down. That job would have helped him keep his family with him. We would have sent Bala to Pune and he could have continued his studies too," Dada apprised his father and brothers at their next meeting.

"Write him a strict letter, Dada! Make it quite clear to him that we will not tolerate such nonsense. What was wrong with the job? Why couldn't he be a missionary for the Prarthana Samaj? That Samaj is a reformed form of Hinduism only. Didn't he always want to effect reforms?" The Lauds were livid.

"He doesn't want to strike the least compromise," Mangu put in an analysis. His comment was received with black looks. They all wanted to write angry letters to Bapu. The only snag was they didn't have his address.

Bapu barely spent a week at Indore. He had met some students in the train and they helped him find a lodge. However, his money was fast depleting. He tapped some well to do Marathi people for aid. But failed to find anything substantial which would help him make it to Banaras. So he left for Ujjain.

Students stood a better chance of fending for themselves at Ujjain, for it was a city of pilgrimage and also a centre of education. The people here were charitable. They appreciated the hunger for education. By now Bapu was desperate enough to want to live by begging. But he became violently sick. He just dumped his scant baggage

in a priest's house and flopped down on the verandah. Luckily no one objected. A few students too turned up there a little later to spend the night. Apparently the priest had been generous enough to allow free use of his premises to the needy. The next morning the students set out on their begging trip, a regular morning ritual. They invited Bapu to join them. But he was too sick and could hardly stir out of the mat which was his bed. They were kind enough to visit a few extra houses and procure food for Bapu.

In the evening Bapu visited Dr. Joglekar who had a dispensary nearby. Here further good fortune awaited him in the form of Mr. Kelkar who was a teacher at the Madhav School. Kelkar invited Bapu to be his guest. Exulted, Bapu jumped at the opportunity. Kelkar introduced him to a few more teachers at the Madhav College. All were impressed with Bapu's tireless pursuit of the study of Buddhism. They all chipped in and gave Bapu enough money for a ticket to Gwalior and a little extra for sundry expenses on way. They also gave him the addresses of kindhearted people over there who could help him reach his goal.

By now a pattern had been set, visit a city, contact helpful people, generally the elites, and seek their help to find facilities for boarding, lodging and further travel. Even though so far Bapu had not been on a begging trip himself, his inner barriers for begging had been demolished. Years back when he had run away to the Mahalaxmi temple at Kolhapur he had been unable to feed himself because he had too much pride left in him to beg. Now he had shed those vestiges. But Dr. Wagle who had become his mentor at Gwalior would not hear of it. He found a room for Bapu in the outhouse of a Sardar's bungalow and had him over at his own place for all his meals. He also treated him for the bouts of severe diarrhoea he was suffering from ever since he tasted the water of the river Kshipra at Ujjain.

Bapu was eager to reach Banaras. But Wagle explained to him that summer at Banaras would be sheer hellfire and he would do better to get there in winter, at least initially. Bapu acquiesced. As usual he spent most of his time reading. He also had a few stanzas from *Kiratarjuniya*, Bhairavi's very difficult Sanskrit epic, explained to him by a tutor of Wagle's nephew. During the six months that Bapu spent there Wagle got inordinately attached to this simple soul. Like everybody else Wagle too thought that Bapu's desire to study Buddhism was no better than a pipe dream. Even though he was not supercilious he was still eager to take this young man under his wings and give him a bright

sensible future, a good job, good prospects and a happy family life. What Wagle didn't know was that many before him had tried and tried in vain to mould Bapu into such a sociable cast and that he had always resented and rebelled against any move intended to achieve this Herculean task.

When they were into the fag end of summer Wagle broached open the subject:

"Kosambi! I consider you to be my younger brother, I do not wish to see you wasting your life travelling aimlessly to unknown countries. You have a good mastery over Marathi. If I put in a word for you, you would easily find a job at a salary of twenty five or thirty rupees. You are clever and honest. So within the next five or six years you would be definitely upgraded to a salary of two hundred and fifty rupees."

Dr. Wagle quoted examples of promotions received, some only on the strength of their mastery of the Marathi language. Bapu was overwhelmed by his concern, but that was all. His advice failed to effect a change in Bapu's urges and targets. He was surprised that on the basis of a six months old friendship Wagle should make such predictions for his future. He candidly told him.

"My struggle is not for money but for self satisfaction. I did not leave my home and country in search of money."

But Wagle was not convinced.

"You are constantly sick. You eat like a mouse. Here you have me to take care of you. You won't find anybody at Banaras for this. If you are not confident about finding a job I am willing to sign a document on stamp paper stating that I would be paying you thirty rupees per month out of my salary till you found a job."

Bapu thanked him for his generosity but clung steadfastly to his resolution.

"I am very grateful to you. For the past six months you have really treated me like a younger brother. I can read your concern for me in your words. Still is it not your duty to help me, your younger brother, to quench the thirst for knowledge that has gripped me? Do you think it right that I should die as a clerk of the Scindia government? Your recommendation would easily get me a clerk's job. But what advantage would I receive in quashing my desire to learn Sanskrit and taking up a clerk's job? If at all you are desirous to help me, do so for my education. I do not crave for any other type of help."

"Dr. Wagle resented this candour. He had a Maratha friend

named Malap. He asked the latter to use his persuasive powers over me. But no power on earth could change my mind". *Nivedan* chapter seven.

Wagle was exceedingly disappointed though he gave twenty rupees, a sturdy woolen coat and his blessings for Bapu's onward journey to Banaras. Bapu thanked him profusely. But the pain of parting was missing. In the six months that Bapu had spent at Gwalior he had not developed any roots and had not deviated at all from his set goal.

Bapu had to urgently get rid of the sanyasi's robes that he had taken to wearing the day he left Pune. The pundits at Gwalior had pointblank refused to teach Sanskrit to a sanyasi. He started wearing dhotis. At Prayag he got a barber to shave his hair and preserve a knot of tonsured hair in the centre. This turned out to be a travesty, an off centre hairy circle with a nearly imperceptible knot. Still it was the best result he could achieve by making use of sign language; he didn't know a word of Hindi. Luckily for him very few at Banaras raised eyebrows at this weird hair style. Most of them forgave him, generously figuring that this was modern style initiated by rebellion against the traditional hairdo of the Brahmins, the shaved head and the tonsured hair. However the four inches long hairy knot had not been discarded, yet.

Banaras was vast and thickly populated. But life for aspiring students were good here. The city abounded in *Annachhatras*, free meal services attached to monasteries and the shastris too did not charge any fee for imparting knowledge. (It was not called tuition at the time.) At Prayag Bapu had procured the address of a Saraswat *Annachhatra* at Durga Ghat and there he proceeded walking through a labyrinthine network of extremely narrow lanes. As usual he found a kind soul there. Govindrao Palekar whose son Waman was a wellknown lawyer at Belgaum and known to Bapu too.

Govindrao lodged Bapu in his room and suggested that he met Gangadharshastri, a renowned pundit for his studies. The shastri accepted Bapu as his student and fixed him up with Nageshwarpant Agnihotri who was one of his top rank students. From seven to eight in the morning Bapu studied the *Kaumudi* with Nageshwarpant, then hung around attending some other classes. At midday he had his meals at the Saraswat *Annachhatra* and mulled over whatever he had studied. The schedule paid rich dividends, he soon came to have impeccable mastery over Sanskrit.

However, so far as the free meals and the facilities for lodging

were concerned it was a different story. There were hardships galore. Govindrao who had been ill and bedridden when Bapu first met him passed away soon. Chidambar Godbole who had been the Manager at the Shenvi monastery turned up with a big fictitious bill for Govindrao's stay and made it clear that Bapu could not continue to stay there unless and until he paid rent. Luckily for him Madhavarcharya, the manager of the monastery at the Brahmaghat, offered him a room. This was a surprise, for earlier he had turned down Bapu's request for a room. Now apparently Bapu's reputation as a serious and hardworking student had been made and that had effected a change in Madhavarcharya's opinion of him. A new friend. Nilkanthshastri Gaitonde joined Bapu here. He had studied the Vedas at the monastery at Kavle, Goa, and had come to Banaras to study the Shastras. The duo had their meals at the Balaji *Annachhatra* founded by the Maharaj Jayajirao Shinde of Gwalior a few years back.

When Jayajirao Shinde visited Banaras he wanted to make a charity of one hundred rupees each to all the Brahmin householders. How ever this offended the pundits at Banaras. They abhorred the idea that an erudite Brahmin and an illiterate one should be considered equals. This infuriated Shrimanta Jayajirao.

"If you are not agreeable I would much rather drown the six lakh rupees brought here for this specific purpose," he thundered.

He would have done so too. But a few levelheaded people acted as arbitrators in the matter and advised the Shrimant to start an *Annachhatra* here out of the amount. Shrimant Jayajirao liked the idea. He got the Balaji temple built by the Peshwas under his aegis from the British and founded an *Annachhatra* there. It is known as the Balaji *Annachhatra*.

Saraswat Brahmins were not allowed to eat at the Balaji *Annachhatra* unless they procured permission from higher authorities and even then they were served food in the second session. [Since they were not considered to be at par with the other Brahmins; Bapu had to face this problem in many places.] However there was no other convenient option open for Bapu.

Barely five to seven men ate in the second session. The officer could easily have accommodated them in the first session. It seemed that they were scared that such a move would turn out to be highly offensive to the Brahmins from the South. Hence the first session was reserved only for the Southern Brahmins.

This rule did have its inconveniences for the second session. If

the number of diners at the first session exceeded the expectation of the managers they added more water to the dal; vegetables disappeared and chapatis became dry. Nor did the second session have a fixed schedule. Its timing fluctuated erratically between midday and four p.m. in the afternoon. The members of the second session were obviously *persona non grata*. The management had nothing but tin ears and stone hearts for them. The only advantage was that these unpleasant conditions increased Bapu's tolerance level. He was very particular about carrying with him a copy of *Kaumudi*, the *Bhagwadgita* or some other book and perused it till food was served. However side by side he also kept running into a representative cross-section of humanity and this taught him a lot. Especially the art of getting along with people without running away to the forests, though he would never really give up this habit completely.

More than the circumstantial hardships, Bapu was buffeted by those beset by men. He bore these too stoically. There was Babasaheb, a descendent of the Sardars of Jamkhindi, who like many others, had scoffed at Bapu's plan to study the Sanskrit religious treatises (shastras) right since day one of Bapu's visit to Gangadharshastri.

"How much have you studied already?" the Sardar had asked with hauteur at their very first meeting.

"I have read two chapters of Kalidasa's *Raghuvamsha*. That's all. I want to start with *Kaumudi*."

Babasaheb was stunned. But quickly recovered himself. He didn't want to show any favourable reaction.

"What would you do with these studies? I conjecture that your age is twenty five. How will you profit by studying *Kaumudi* if you start now? You will derive greater benefits if you find a job in the Railway or some such place. Don't you waste time over studying. I am advising you because I am steeped in worldly wisdom! Do you have any idea how many years one needs to put in to master a shastra?"

"How many?"

"It comes to twelve years per *Shastra*. Are you willing to stay here for that along?"

"It is not too long a time. I don't care if I have to put in twenty or even twenty five. But I do want to gain a perfect mastery over Sanskrit."

Bapu remained unperturbed. Taunts, invectives or sycophancy made no difference to him whatsoever.

"Look! You are a Hindu. You must be having faith in rebirth.

Do you accept the tenet of rebirth or not?" he asked.

"I do. But how is this relevant to this matter?"

"I am not putting in all this hard work for immediate reward in this life. I would enjoy its fruition in my next life. I would find it easier to grasp the *Shastras* in my next life. Don't you agree?"

Weird though the argument was Babasaheb had found it invincible.

"If you have faith in this wayward logic you are welcome to go ahead," Babasaheb muttered, retreating, but was quick to learn the lesson that one should never argue with the Kosambis.

The city seemed to be abounding in idlers who had perfected the art of advancing fallacious logic to justify their free living and other caprices. There was Mrityunjaya who was the scourge of the diners at the second session.

A Saraswat Brahmin from Cochin, he had come to Banaras at a very early age. Many kind souls had tried to educate him. But Mrityunjaya had spurned the efforts of them all. He just wasn't interested in learning anything. His speciality was to pick up fights with one and all. Once or twice his uncontrollable verbal bravado had almost led to his expulsion from the *Annachhatra* and he had nearly had a brush with death by starvation. However, the widows who were employed as cooks had pleaded for his comeback and he had been once again enrolled for free meals.

By now Mrityunjaya, the master of diatribe, had taken to directing his flair at other easy preys. Indeed this had become his hobby. Very few Brahmins ate at the second session and Mrityunjaya had no courage to pick up a fight with the few who did. He knew but too well that if they lodged a complaint about him to the officers, the doors of the *Annachhatra* would be permanently closed to him. Still he did manage to come up with some acerbic criticism of Bapu and Nilakanthashastri. His argument was that they took advantage of the free meals to 'waste' time in learning the ancient treatises. He pointed out that they were definitely going to utilize their knowledge to earn a livelihood. In other words they would be selling the *Shastras* eventually. This selfish act was bound to penalize them with doom in hell after death, he predicted. The premise allowed the pillion to justify himself and lambast the others in one and the same breath!

"I have been in Banaras for fifteen years. But have I ever studied the ancient treatises? Some wise men here did think of teaching the *Shastras* to me. But I turned them down. I don't want to have anything

to do with them. I don't want to sell my knowledge and be doomed to eternal hell. These *Annachhatras* have not been founded for those who want to study the *Shastras*. They are intended to give a boost to baths in Ganga and stays at Banaras," he held, Since Mrityunjaya was incorrigible everybody left him alone.

There were many warmhearted friends who compensated for his sly remarks. These were the pundits, Madhavarcharya and his wife who went out of her way to cook special meals for Bapu whenever he was sick (and this was frequent) or on Ekadashi days when the *Annachhatra* was closed. There were the rich traders who gave grain as alms and there was Nilakanthashastri, Bapu's colleague and room partner. The latter had refused to leave Bapu during a vicious bout of plague. Bapu had high temperature and he felt that he was one of the victims of the horrendous malady. However, it had turned out to be a simple case of flu. Surprisingly, Nilakanthashastri who was a very nervous person in other respects was not intimidated by the fear of getting infected. Not only did he not go away from the monastery he even refused to move his bed an inch away from Bapu's. Surprisingly, plague left Bapu alone. Flu, dyspepsia and diarrhoea were his chronic ailments. In the years to come he would run into bouts of plague at Indore and Nagpur and still emerge unassailed.

By now Bapu had learnt to take the rough with the smooth. The sly remarks did not affect him. Nor did the love and concern of the people made him grow roots. Apparently the doctrine of purging anger, irritation, annoyance as well as love, joy and concern had clipped his ability to form attachments and take roots. But he became a lover of people, a characteristic that would stay with him all his life, not caring what status, education, post, caste, viewpoints, religion, opinions, nature or character they had. He had come out of the small pond of Goan society to take the vast ocean of humanity head on. The adventure with all its struggles, hardships, traumas, dangers and obstacles filled his heart with exultance.

Through all these ups and downs he stuck to his goal. In fact the fire had been burning wildly inside him since Gwalior. But after he settled down in at Banaras he mailed a few postcards. Postcards were an unaffordable luxury for him. In the mean while his family had received his news from the Palekars at Belgaum. He had received a blistering reply from Dada this time. "Compromise for heavens' sake!" was its theme. Without mincing his words Dada had enjoined him to accept a job if ever one came his way or even to accept the one offered

by Dr. Bhandarkar if it was still open. By now Dada had also found out about Dr. Wagle's offer of a job at Gwalior.

"We appreciate your thirst for knowledge. You have our full support for that. However, we do not want you to neglect Bala and Manik. If you do not have a job you can stay with us. We are not encumbered in any way by having them with us. But it is not right that you have the opportunity for a job and still turn your back to it. It is not fair to Bala and Manik. They should be with you. Such were the vows that you took at the time of the marriage. And so on. Dada had chosen to write a two page letter in an envelope even though the envelopes were opened by the Portuguese and censored, thus causing an extra delay in their despatch.

Bapu was absolutely heartbroken. He had always looked upon Dada as his ardent supporter. Now he found out that Dada too had crossed over to the other side. The letter failed to achieve the intended result. There were many at Banaras right now who had tried to tempt him with a job or argued against his set goal. Long time ago he had become inured to such advice, beseechment or reproof. Next time he wrote postcards Dada's address was not on his list. He had made an appeal for money to all his friends. He had specially excluded Dada, for obviously the latter would reiterate his counsel of wisdom. Bapu did not want a gift with such strings attached. He did not want to bend. He wanted a loan. He had made this clear in his letter. He falsified the rule that beggars could not be choosers.

The one calamity he couldn't get over this time was a financial crunch. He didn't need to spend on food and tuitions. He had paid a frugal fee to Gangadharshastri, that of a coconut and a rupee, and he ate whatever he was served at the *Annachhatra*. But after a year at Banaras his dhotis became threadbare. He feared that he would soon be accused of walking around indecently if he didn't find money for new clothes.

He sold his copy of *Amar Kosh* to Goswami, a young guru of the Gujaratis and bought a pair of *panchas*, coarse short dhotis which would last for two three months. He was hopeful that one of his friends would oblige him with a tidy sum. However, no one sent anything, not even a letter. So finally he decided to save the paisa they were given every day at the *Annachatra* by way of Dakshina, a gift given to the Brahmins. They had been using this paisa to buy oil for the lamp they needed to light at night. Now they opted to do away with light at night and recite whatever they had learnt during the day. It worked.

Then one day out of blue a registered letter arrived. It was from Guno, a barber friend of Bapu's. It contained ten rupees.

"He is free of addictions. He doesn't even munch tobacco, an addiction which is highly recrudescant amidst all age groups in Goa. Also he has painstakingly taught himself a variety of arts. He can draw and paint. He makes clay statues. He can read books. He indulges in this craftsmanship in his leisure hours. Right now he has started a biscuit factory at Madgaon. He happened to see a biscuitmaker at Mumbai. When he got back home he fabricated a similar machine out of old scrap. He is using this machine for making his biscuits. We began to love this man whose virtues like honesty, magnanimity industriousness, love for knowledge and lack of addictions endeared him to us," Bapu would eulogize his friend in *Nivedan* chapter nine.

Once again the money reassured him that at least one old friend stood by him steadfastly. For two rupees Bapu bought a blanket and they gave up saving the paisa. They lit their oil lamps at night and read by its light. By now he had a good grasp over Sanskrit grammar and had read many important works in that language. This fanned his ambition to get to Nepal and study Buddhism, for there was nothing more to be done at Banaras. He kept nosing for opportunities to go to Nepal and suddenly one fine day found one.

He made friends with Durganath, a young Nepali, who was studying the Sanskrit religious treatises from Nageshwarpant Dharmadhikari. He implored Durganath to take him to Kathmandu who quickly agreed to do so. A primordial panic wave swept over Bapu's friends and gurus. He had often talked about going to Kathmandu. But they had not taken him seriously. He had achieved outstanding progress in Sanskrit, he would soon get back home and find a job there, they pointed out. But now that his Nepal trip was finalized they were worried. That journey involved a trek of more than a hundred miles over mountainous terrain. Nepali students frequently did this and turned up at Banaras for their studies. But Bapu was not used to such treks. Nor did he have the woolen trousers and thick shoes required for the venture. They worked over Bapu day in and day out. One of them peered into Bapu's future and predicted calamities and a change in Bapu's resolution.

"Calamities would hound me right here if such is my destiny." He remarked grinning. He had always been prepared for death, the final calamity. The thought of lesser ones was not going to influence him

Once again there was the lure of a good job offer. Kalyanshastri, a wellknown priest and scholar from Kolhapur had undertaken a pilgrimage of the sacred Hindu places. He was overwhelmingly impressed by the progress made by Bapu within the short span of fifteen months. He promised he would find a job for Bapu at Kolhapur at a salary of fifty or sixty rupees. The job would give Bapu an opportunity to live with his family and have a more comfortable life. But to everybody's chagrin he turned it down with the usual hardnosed bluntness they had been familiar with.

"I am leaving for Nepal. If I survive the journey I will give you offer a thought," he said.

Kalyanshastri gave up. He gave his blessings and four rupees for the expense of the journey.

On the second of February, 1902, Bapu and Durganath boarded the train for Ruksaul, a town close to the boundary of Nepal. They halted for the night. Then began to walk.

SIX

1st - 21st March 1902

At Belgaum the Palekars had been talking of Bapu in glowing words. His kindness, helpfulness and resourcefulness. They refuted the rumour that he had become a sanyasi. He wore dhotis and his knot of tonsured hair was back if ever he had really done away with it, they said. He had made fabulous progress in Sanskrit. His teachers were astounded by his ability to grasp this difficult and dead language at this late an age. They put it down to the intensity of his desire to learn it.

Bala was happy. As happy as she could be under the circumstances. She had stayed at Chikhali for well over three and half months in social seclusion. Months that she had spent crying and moping. Much though she was needed at Sankhwal she had no courage to go there and face the wagging tongues. For the same reason she had given up attending the social functions. But once the news arrived from Belgaum she swung into action instantly. She packed her stuff and a substantial food hamper and went back to Sankhwal, her home.

"Who told you that Bapu had taken sanyas? Bring that liar before me, I will take him left and right." She thundered. The handful of remote relatives in that household were incredulous. Her transformation from a crybaby to a battleaxe was a miracle. She had been howling with the pain of desertion when she took off with Kashba a few months back.

For once the women were flummoxed. They didn't expect Bala to turn up and launch a counterattack. They too had known for some time that Bapu was still a householder, that he hadn't jettisoned his marital duties. Bapu's sister lived at Belgaum and long time back the Palekars had contacted her and thanked her for Bapu's help for Govindshastri's funeral. But they had not bothered to pass the news on to Bala. Nothing constructive was ever done in that myopic world.

"We don't know. We just believed whatever we heard. Is it our fault?" they muttered apologetically in self-defense.

"In future don't talk unless and until you are absolutely sure," Bala hissed.

Ramchandradada was inordinately happy to have her back at

Sankhwal.

"Balabai! Nobody chased you away. Even if Bapu goes in for sanyas this is your home. You will always be welcome here," he remarked on his next visit from Kholgad.

Ramchandradada's daughters-in-law who were barely fourteen and fifteen implored Bala to stay on too. Bala was fantastic at housekeeping. With her around there would be no theft nor wastages. Unlike Bapu she did not balk at responsibilities.

But Bala's heart was no more in that household. She stayed there for less than a month. Then she was back at Chikhali, her haven.

"Bala! If you want to put an end to wagging tongues you should stay at Sankhwal. That is your home," Mangu advised her.

"I know how to do that," Bala retorted. The grin that accompanied her words made it clear that if it came to that she might even physically snip all those wagging tongues. With all her sensitivity, sharpness, boldness, intelligence and wit she was getting to be more aggressive than Dada, the epitome of that quality. For a brief moment sadness gripped Mangu's mind. He recollected how their parents had tried to shape her up into an ideal daughter-in-law, meek, smiling and tireless. Instead, she seemed to be blossoming into a person with a will of her own. He wondered whether she could ever get back into the grooves of a happy and unconflicting dependent marriage. His uninvited advice was intended to effect this before it was too late and she a misfit. But he could sense failure staring him in the face.

"You don't. You just feel you do. Tongues are wagging already. People are accusing you of shirking responsibilities".

"Me? They do have a gumption!"

"The Kosambis do not have anybody else to look after that household. If you want Bapu to do the needful you have to do the needful too."

"Ramchandradada has not insisted that I should. I am allowed to do as I please."

"That is because he has given up. They are in trouble. A little more or a little less makes no difference to him. But if on your own you opt to share the household responsibilities it would go a long way towards making the situation better."

"Their situation, not mine. For me it would be living on a battlefield."

"So it would." Mangu could not help smiling. But he didn't allow himself to digress. "Yet you have to do it. Marriage means

handling responsibilities together. Marriage turns a one-horse chariot into a two-horse one. If one horse walks away the second one still has to go on."

"No, not necessarily. Anyway in this case the second horse is not continuing to drag the chariot. He is going to stand by and wait. He will get back to the harness only after the other horse turns up".

"Stop it, Bala! You should be there, you know. Then people will praise you and appreciate you. You will have a burnished gold reputation." This had been an impassioned remark spoken from the bottom of the heart. It hit a soft spot in Bala's heart. Her lustrous eyes became downcast. Lines of anger and the fighting spirit disappeared. Those of stress and anguish came up.

"I should, I know," she answered introspectively. "But I can't. This is a crazy situation. I cannot cope with it if I have to stay at Sankhwal."

"I know. Still I feel that it will be wise to go through the ordeal".

"My world is crumbling, it has crumbled already and you want me to follow rules of wisdom? I am not a saint. Bapu is one."

"Saints should not have families."

"Or if they do they should send them to the bottom of the sea before taking off in search of new horizons." Mangu gave up. He saw no point in trying to improve matters. They had all reached a no-win situation and any effort to whisk themselves out of it was going to backfire.

Bala made it a point to attend all the social and religious functions which were the monopoly of married women. She even attended two where she not been invited and made her status clear in a loud and belligerent voice. She made the same point at Chikhali too. There were quite a few newcomers there and these did not care to ostracize the family of Kashba Laud. She was very much a happily married woman and they better acknowledge this status of hers or else face her terrible wrath. After a couple of juicy fights with Bala they all got the message. Bala got invited unfailingly, sometimes even when others were not. Manik was the only baby in that house and the apple of their eyes. Kakibai and Vainibai were childless. Jagu had been married. But had not come of age yet. Mangu evinced no interest in marriage.

"I was smothered with love. No female child got as much love as I did." Manik would claim later on in a voice ringing with pride. The fact that it came from everybody else except her father did not afflict her in anyway. Also, she was the only one who came up with such a

statement.

Dada was deeply worried about the absence of a reply from Bapu. In fact he was questioning the wisdom of having written that terse letter. As the days passed by and no letter came, his hopes of effecting a change in Bapu's heart dwindled. He had been filled with great selfconfidence when he wrote that letter thinking that it would be an eyeopener for Bapu and make him board the train the very next day. Now he could see that even he did not have the power to draw Bapu away from his chosen path howsoever foolhardy it was. Externally he had made light of the absence of a letter. He didn't want to push the panic button of his family. Already they were all behaving like they were walking through a minefield. They were taut, there were constant discussions about what Bala should do and conjectures about Bapu's return. For this they had to launch a massive drive collecting information about Bapu since the latter wrote very short letters and Ramchandradada never passed on any of them.

One day Kashba received news that Ramchandradada had received a postcard from Bapu. He was aghast to find that they had failed to receive one. Normally his postcards turned up in a bunch. Dada made light of his father's mounting anxieties.

"The next one will be ours. Probably he would accept the next job offer and then write." Dada had sought to allay his fearful doubts. But his own exasperation had crossed limits. He continued to assiduously inveigle news about Bapu in every way possible. His warning bells were ringing and he feared that he had antagonized Bapu for good. He had figured that he would spend one more year at Kashi learning the treatises. What he hadn't figured was that Bapu would take off even further, to the Himalayas.

One day Bala went to their well to wash Manik's new dress which had been bedecked with some fine bead embroidery. Bala did not want to entrust its cleaning to the servants. Vacchabai was washing Ladu's clothes by their well. She never got these washed by the servants.

"Doesn't Dada send anything anymore to Bapu?" Vacchabai asked angrily. Even though her family observed the terms of the ordinance and had given up visiting Kashba, the women talked to each other whenever they set eyes on each other. Anyway right now Vacchabai was boiling with indignation and she just couldn't have remained silent.

"What do you mean? He sent ten rupees at his Pune address," Bala spat back. She was always quick to draw fire to defend herself and

her brothers and parents.

"That was more than a year back. Do they think that fortune will last him a life time?" Vacchabai, older than Bala by twenty five years, was not going to be cowered by the latter's quarrelsome stance. In fact she had broached open the subject in order to pick up a fight.

"Where will he send the money if he doesn't have an address?" Bala snapped back. But her voice cracked a little bit and lost its sharp edge.

"Your brothers are raking information about Bapu like silt from the riverbed and you claim that they do not have his address? Mind you, I am not saying they should support him. But then they shouldn't pretend to or make too much noise about the ten rupees that they sent once upon a time. For your information Bapu is desperate for dhosis. He has been at Kashi for two years and the fortune that your Dada sent him has been used up. He had written to Guno barber and the poor man was going round literally begging for Bapu. Luckily I met him and gave him ten rupees."

"It is a lie. It is not true." For once Bala broke down and fled inside her house. In the evening when her brothers and father returned home from their paddy fields she gave them a piece of her mind.

"Shouldn't you have sent a money order to Bapu without waiting for an appeal from him? Did you blame him in anyway? Send him a nasty letter? How come he has condescended to write to the barber, but has not written to you?" She was berserk. She calmed down only after they promised her they would send a substantial aid immediately. Kashba sent a kulak to Sankhwal to get Bapu's address. But the man came back with the news that Bapu had left for the Himalayas.

Bala began to bang her head against the wall and cry her heart out.

"What is her future going to be like? Would she ever experience happiness?" Kashba moaned.

"Don't ask me, Baba. I have had enough. I could do just this much and no more. I felt sending money was right. So I sent. I could have gone on sending. But you cautioned me against it. So I stopped. This is exactly what I was fearing, that Bapu would shrink further away from us all if ever he feels that the money is intended to harness him in some way to family life. He will come when he wants to come. In the meanwhile he would have at least lived in comfort if I had sent him some money. Henceforth I am not going to take any decision in this matter. I will do exactly as you tell me. I have my patients to worry

about. I am dropping this matter from my mind forthwith," Dada rasped. He had reached the fag end of his patience. He already had one moping woman on his hands, his wife, now he had two, his wife and his sister.

"We figured that he was doing all right. We gathered that everything was free at Banaras." Kashba muttered apologetically.

"Bapu has piled problems on everyone! He has generated a maelstrom of fights and tiffs," Mangu summarised. He had never spoken truer words.

Bapu, Durganath and the two servants that they had hired had completed the trek of the Tarai region of Nepal. Now they were working their way through the mountainous regions. The hardships that Bapu had experienced so far were beds of roses compared to what he was going through now. He was too frail to undertake such a strenuous trip. Nor did he have enough money to buy warm clothes and good shoes. The old shoes that he had brought from Pune disintegrated completely after a trek of a few miles the very first day. There was no option but to throw them away and walk barefoot the rest of the hundred miles. The dust infected the wounds of shoebites and gave him unbearable pain. The first three days he lived on two snacks comprising flaked rice and unpalatable jaggery. Afterwards Durganath invited him to join him for lunch which was rice and boiled *kokum*. Yet this helped.

Bapu had never been sturdy. Only his intense urge to read the Buddhist doctrines in the original kept him going. Durganath's servants cracked jokes at his expense and burst at the seams laughing, for they had never seen such a frail person. They themselves were small, but sturdy and wiry. Bapu was the exact opposite. His body was all skin and a little bit of flesh, no fat or muscle. He was certainly not made out for a Himalayan trek. Durganath himself had been aware of these grave flaws since day one. But he also knew of Bapu's incredible tenacity and determination. However after a few days he got fed up of walking at Bapu's slow, dragging speed. Once they crossed the Khari Gadhi, the checkpoint of the Nepali government, he just took off leaving Bapu at the mercy of the heartless servants.

Jaded though Bapu was, he became incredibly highspirited at the sight of the snowcovered Himalayan ranges. The sight of the beautiful vista made him forget the excruciating pain in his feet. It also gave him a feeling of achievement.

"I fail to pen all the thoughts that crossed my mind on this occasion. I was born in Goa which was backward at the time. If a man from Goa travels to Kashi it is considered to be a sensational adventure.

Crossing the Sahyadri is considered to be a Herculean achievement in Goa. But today I, a Goan, have made it to the Himalayas! I am standing here on top of the Chandragadhi and drinking in the beauty of the Himalayas! At the same time I could not claim to be a confirmed adventurer or a man with extraordinary ability. I have always been scared of travelling. The troubles that I experienced prove that I am short on strength. I was convinced that today I could feast my eyes on the beauty of the Himalayas because of my love for the Buddha. A train of similar thought gripped my mind and my faith in Buddhism became stauncher." *Nivedan*, chapter ten.

Durganath's father and grandfather received him, a complete stranger, with touching warmth. The simple meal that they served felt like ambrosia. The cold was unbearable. But Durganath's father gave him a blanket and prepared a bed for him by spreading hay on the floor. He had a small cotton shawl with which he covered his shoulders whenever he attended a religious function at the *Chhatra*. He cut it in to two pieces and wrapped his cracked and blistered feet with these. The device fortified him against the cold somewhat. The hardships did not dampen his enthusiasm. But he was grossly disheartened and disillusioned by the state of negligence bordering on disgrace into which Buddhism had fallen there. He knew that Nepal was a Hindu country. But Dr. Bhandarkar's words had led him to believe that it was a centre for the study of Buddhism too. Apparently it wasn't. There was a Stupa by the side of the Guhyeshwari temple in Kathmandu. But Durganath adjured Bapu not to give it a look. Brahmins were apparently supposed to have a bath, a purification gesture, if inadvertently the Stupa sailed into their vision. The Buddha's principles of nonviolence and kindness to all beings had disappeared too from the country of the Buddha's birth. Slaughter of animals was very common in the temples. Bapu was never more revulsed in life.

"The Guhyeshwari temple has a roof of silver sheets and a gold crest. Inside there is a small square. On one side of it there is an idol, the shape of the female genitalia, one foot broad and three feet long. It is probably made of stone, but is covered with a golden sheath. There are a few more stone idols around it resembling the vague shapes of the prehistoric stone gods of Maharashtra, Mhasoba, Dagdoba, etc. The square as well as the idols are perennially covered with blood, so much so that they could be compared within bounds of justification, to a slaughterhouse...

The temple of Pashupati is situated on a small mound. The

temple is very small. It contains a large Linga with four faces on its four sides. The priests are Brahmins from the South. Animals are not sacrificed in the courtyard of this temple. But close by there are smaller temples of Gorakshanath, etc. and here animals are freely sacrificed. It is a wonder that the idol of a saint like Gorakshanath too is bathed in blood." *Nivedan*, chapter ten.

Bapu was eager to visit the Buddha stupa. But he could see that Durganath would be scandalized if he expressed such a desire. The former knew Bapu as a student of Sanskrit only. Bapu now feared that if he ever came to discover Bapu's reverence for Buddhism he might turn against him and withdraw all help. So one afternoon he paid a surreptitious visit to the Stupa without informing anybody. He hoped to find there a learned Buddhist monk or at least a Buddhist person. But here too his hopes were dashed to the ground. Some saints from Tibet had opened shop by the side of the Stupa to presage good and bad days by throwing dice. Nearby a goat had been killed and its carcass laid out in all its goriness for sale. Somehow Bapu overcame his shock and dismay at these unfamiliar sights and instituted inquiries for a learned monk. But he discovered that these godmen who claimed to be masters of the art of reading dice and predicting auspicious days represented the apex of erudition there. His mind sank into stark melancholy. Thoughts of ending his worthless life began to hound him again.

Now that he had been given many conducted tours of Kathmandu, Durganath's father and grandfather seemed impatient for his departure. Nepal had just been through a revolution. The atmosphere was highly explosive and all foreigners were suspect and looked down upon as probable spies or people with ulterior motives. No Nepali person was willing to discuss politics with a foreigner, not even Durganath. The grandfather who was a government servant dreaded the wrath of the government. Bapu stayed with him for a long time and proved himself to be more than a casual tourist. Still Bapu managed to put together a sketchy history of Nepal.

Eager though Durganath's family was to send off Bapu they were not curt or impolite in any way. Their concern for him knew no bounds. They wouldn't hear of Bapu's taking off without a proper guide to help him over the mountainous terrain.

Luckily for Bapu and them they soon found ideal company for the former's journey back — the water carriers. These had come from Badrikedar carrying *Teerath* in large pitchers balanced over the two

ends of a pole which they carried on their shoulders. They agreed to escort Bapu till Ruksaul. From there Bapu would be left to himself.

The arrangements were good. The only reason why Bapu hesitated was that he didn't have destination yet. He didn't want to go back home., he didn't want to get back to Banaras and Ceylon was miles away.

"Then out of the blue I had a brainwave which put an end to my oscillation. At Gwalior I had read a book titled *Kashiyatra* (Pilgrimage to Kashi). It had made a reference to a court matter regarding a Buddhist temple fifteen miles to the South of Gaya. I suddenly remembered this information now and resolved to travel down to this place and stay there.

I figured that the place was in barren land and bereft of facilities for lodging and boarding. Still even although I risked to die of starvation I made up my mind to spend my life there. Also I hoped that I might run into a Buddhist monk there who had undertaken the pilgrimage to Buddhagaya and he could give me directions for the studies of Buddhism.

Supposing I failed to find someone in that isolated place at least I would die in a spiritual state of mind. The daze of shock I was labouring under ever since the decadence of Buddhism in Nepal had been driven home to me would be dispelled. Once I took this decision my despondency fizzled out in no time." *Nivedan*, Chapter Ten.

He touched people freely, and without reserve, for financial help. Krishnashastry Dravid, the head priest at the Pashupati temple had already given him some money. He now offered some more. Durganath's family was generous. A few others chipped in and he was on way to Buddhagaya, another unknown place. The trip to Nepal had turned out to be a dismal failure so far as Bapu's search for Buddhism was concerned. But it had gone a long way towards enriching his repertoire of hardships and forbearance.

SEVEN

27th February - 18th March 1902

Once again Bapu tied up his feet in oddbits of cloth and completed the seventy mile Himalayan trek to Ruksaul. However with a heartening difference. In comparison with Durganath's heartless servants who had had laughing fits at Bapu's sight and made him carry his luggage, the water carriers were angels. They looked after Bapu like a little child, carrying his luggage for him and making a halt as soon as they noted signs of fatigue on his face. When they parted company Bapu gave away most of the stuff that he wouldn't need in the warmer climate, keeping for himself only a blanket, a coat, a pheta (head scarf), two dhotis, a few books, one pitcher, two khaddar vests and a pair of dumbbells. With the money that he had in his possession he bought a ticket to Bankipur for two rupees saving twelve annas for food. By now he was living on one meal per day to make the twelve annas last longer.

He spent a night at a free rest house in the company of mendicants, sanyasis, priests and other wanderers who were a hallmark of the society at that time. In the morning he sold the pair of dumbbells for twelve annas and bought a ticket for Gaya. A pundit in his compartment warned him to quash all hopes of finding any help there. It was populated by a business-minded community, he said, mainly priests and their agents. Bapu made light of the warning as the pundit's personal prejudice. But found out soon that it was nothing but the truth. Nobody entertained the idea of giving him a free meal or a bed for the night. Gaya was no place for a student wanting to live on charity. All entreaties were rejoined but with one curt reply: Give oblations to your ancestors. This implied paying them fat fees for which Bapu had neither the means nor the inclination.

The pundit had the foresight of giving Bapu the address of a helpful doctor. However, the doctor was away. His sixteen year old son didn't deem it fit to take in a total stranger. But he informed Bapu that Buddhagaya was at a distance of seven miles from Gaya. In the book *Kashiyatra* it had been misquoted as fifteen miles. Heartened, Bapu was immediately struck with the idea of walking there. The son found a coolie for him and they set off.

Bapu had instructed the coolie to take him to the Buddhist monastery. But the fellow was a Muslim and probably did not make a distinction between the Buddhists and the Hindus. The Hindu temple complex at Buddhagaya was more wellknown and he led Bapu there. This came as a mild shock for Bapu who was under a tight lid. The Nepal trip had opened up his eyes to the fact that the Hindus were often antagonistic to the Buddhists. He was happy to get some food and get to share a room with four other students who were studying Sanskrit there. Discreet enquiries revealed that Dharmapal, a Buddhist monk had filled a suit on the Mahant, the chief of the Hindu temple. For Bapu this was good news. He longed to meet Dharmapal.

The next day Bapu paid a secret visit to the Buddhist temple. He was astounded to find that the idol of the Buddha enshrined there was bedecked with a trishula-shaped tilak on his brow. The tilak is a sine qua non of Hinduism. The Buddha had preached against all externalizations of faith like rites and embellishments, including the *tilak*. However he kept his curiosity on hold. He figured he would solve the mystery after he met Dharmapal. Later he came to know that the idol of the Buddha and a few other paintings had been brought by Dharmapal from Japan. Still the mystery of the *tilak* remained unsolved.

Bapu was sorely disappointed to find that Dharmapal was out of station. He was on a visit to his home country, Ceylon, and had engaged a monk to look after the place in his absence. However, he managed to find out some very useful information from the monk. Till then Bapu's rudimentary information about Buddhism had been based on perfunctory discussions with the people he had met so far. He had till then believed that Pali was the ancient language of Siam and that *Tripitaka*, (Tripitaka in Sanskrit means three baskets) the Buddhist scriptures, had been published there by the king of Siam.

Now he was stunned to know from the monk that Pali was an ancient Indian language, that all Buddhist books had been written in that language and the monks had to stay at a Vihara and learn it. The monk showed him many Pali treatises. However they had been written in the Sinhalese script and Bapu could not read them. But the monk did so for his benefit. Bapu was elated to discover that Pali was very close to Sanskrit and that he would have no problem picking it up. He requested the monk to be his teacher. But he was not sufficiently qualified to do so. However, he was of immense help in other respects. He suggested that Bapu's best chance to learn Pali was to go to Ceylon. Since neither distances nor absence of good transportation facilities

ever bothered Bapu, he was immediately taken up with the idea and sought the monk's advice for making the trip possible.

"If you make it to Calcutta there is an institute there named Mahabodhi Sabha. This institute will give you the aid to go to Ceylon. A Sinhali monk who is on a pilgrimage of the holy Buddhist places is scheduled to depart from Calcutta for Ceylon. He would be leaving on the 10th of March. If you manage to reach Calcutta by that time you would be saving yourselves quite a few botherations," he said chalking out a whole new plan for Bapu. Bapu had no hesitation accepting it. Dharmapal, whom he was dying to meet, was there, the country abounded in Viharas where he could learn Pali and read the Buddha's scriptures he had been wandering in search for, and a precise way to make it there had been pointed out to him by this helpful monk. He would be a fool not to follow this perfect plan.

However the plan was characterized by a major snag: shortness of time and resources. The day was the 28th of February. For a man who had one paisa in his pockets to think of a trip to Calcutta was worse than building castles in the air. The train ticket to Calcutta cost four rupees and some annas, Bapu decided to beg, borrow or sell, his usual practise for finding that money. He sold his copy of *Amarkosha*, an ancient Sanskrit dictionary, for eight annas. Then he implored the monk to give him a loan of four rupees. But the monk turned him down bluntly.

"People have frequently borrowed money from me under the pretext of visiting the Mahabodhi Sabha and have never returned, I don't have faith in beggars any more," He snapped.

Undaunted, Bapu knocked on a few more doors and managed to raise two rupees. But it was soon evident that he would be able to collect no more at Buddhagaya even if he held people by their ankles and shake the coins out of their pockets. So finally he spent a rupee and a quarter and bought a ticket for Lakhisarai. This was as far as the money would take him.

At Lakhisarai a lawyer named Bukharilal gave him four annas and suggested that he visit Ravaneshwarprasad, the Prince of Giddhor who was reputed to be a charitable man. Bapu boarded the morning train to Giddhor. But found out on way that there was one more State, Khaira, nearby. So he got down at Jamui and walked seven miles to the Prince of Khaira. There he found out that the Prince never met any of the mendicants. They were given free food by the officers and a gift of one anna at the most. Dejected, he walked five more miles to Giddhor.

Here too it was the same story. There was a free rest house intended for mendicants and recluses. The extent of the gift given to the needy once was eight annas. Bapu could see that it would be lunacy to waste time for such a trivial gift. He wrote to his friends Nilakanthabhat at Banaras requesting a money order of three rupees by return post. The infallible good friend was quick to oblige. On the fourth day Bapu became richer by three rupees. On that day Ravaneshwarprasad too had become more generous and sent him a gift of one whole rupee instead of the customary half one. He walked to the Zaza station, another long trek, and boarded the Calcutta bound train there.

Finding the address of the Mahabodhi Sabha in the megalopolis was a near-ordeal. But a man who had crossed the whole of North India on a shoestring budget was not going to balk at it. Bapu found it and was well received by Aghorichandra, the resident manager of the institute who was also a clerk at the Calcutta High Court. He recommended that Bapu travel by train till Tutikorin, then embark on a steamer for Colombo. This was fine except for the usual snag: Bapu had only a couple of rupees left with him. Also the Sinhalese monk had departed and he would have to undertake the journey on his own. Luckily he was allowed to stay on the premises of the Mahabodhi Sabha and was given his meals there.

Once again Bapu launched a campaign for raising the money from charitable people. But managed to collect only three rupees. He decided that with the money he would buy a train ticket to Puri and walk the rest of the way. Aghoribabu was shocked to hear of this crazy plan. All the same it drove home to him the intensity of Bapu's desire. He quickly came up with an efficacious plan to raise money. He drafted a nice letter in English and circulated it amidst the rich members of the Mahabodhi Sabha. People heartily responded to it, but on one condition. Aghoribabu should himself buy the ticket to Tutikorin and put Bapu on the train. This was to make sure that their money was used for the specific purpose it was raised for. Obviously they too had burnt their fingers by the deceptions practised on them by cons. The kind soul gave Bapu two letters, one addressed to Dharmapal, the other to Singaravelu, the secretary of the Mahabodhi Sabha, Chennai.

Aghoribabu also briefed Bapu on a short history of the Mahabodhi Sabha: It had been founded by Colonel Alcott and Madame Blavatsky, the founders of the Theosophical Movement. In course of their travels round the world to spread their new doctrine they had visited Sri Lanka. Here they had been inordinately impressed by the

19th March 1902 - 3rd March 1903

Vidyodaya Vihara Managed by Shrisumangalacharya. They had founded the Theosophical Society in 1875 in New York. They believed that knowledge about God could be attained by spiritual ecstasy and intuition. They desired to form a nucleus of universal brotherhood, study Aryan and other ancient Eastern cultures, especially Vedic and Buddhist religions, literatures and philosophies. They found Buddhism to be a perfect match for their philosophy and decided to toil for better conditions for Buddhism in Sri Lanka. The fruition of their tireless strife is the hundreds of primary schools that the Buddhists are managing in that country to date.

Colonel Alcott travelled to Chennai and made this city the centre of his activity. In 1891 Dharmapal, the son of Don Carolis, a famous Sinhalese merchant, visited India. He visited Buddhagaya and was deeply moved by the regrettable plight of the temple of the Buddha there. He incorporated the project of its maintenance in the aims and policies of the Mahabodhi Sabha which had already been founded and had a branch at Calcutta. Shrisumangalacharya was the Chairman and Dharmapal the secretary of its main body, Singaravelu, secretary of its Chennai branch.

Aghoribabu's second letter addressed to Singaravelu was just a standby, in case of an emergency. However it turned out to be a very good idea.

On the 15th of March, 1902 Bapu boarded the train. Then got the devastating news that passengers arriving from Calcutta are kept in quarantine at Tutikorin. Since he had only a rupee and half left with him he would be in no position to buy his food during the quarantine period. So he got down at Chennai and contacted Singaravelu. Singaravelu received him with warmth and gave him a letter addressed to Dr. Mudaliar, his friend. The doctor received Bapu at the station and arranged to procure for him a pass to enter Sri Lanka without going through the ordeal of the quarantine.

With mounting joy Bapu embarked on the steamer for Colombo. It reached that port in the early morning. The language barrier was unabated. But Bapu was not cowered by it. By now he had become an expert at sign language. He meandered around the city and travelled a couple of times by the horsedrawn tram he had become familiar with at Calcutta, showing people the envelope addressed to Dharmapal. It worked. In a few hours' time he located Dharmapal at a small room next to his father's shop. Dharmapal was sick with a bout of migraine. But was very courteous. He read the letters and invited Bapu in sign language to make himself at home. Bapu had a bath, a snack and that was that. He had arrived at his destination.

For the first time in his life Bapu found himself surrounded by an atmosphere of his liking. Goa, his home country, had been crushingly critical, Pune and Banaras meaningful yet sheer stepping stones to his goal, the search for Buddhism, and Nepal a sad letdown. Sri Lanka, pulsating with Buddhist ideas and lifestyles was exquisitely bracing. The country was profusely dotted with *viharas* where living conditions and facilities for the study of Pali were excellent. The percentage of Buddhists in the population was very high. The people were friendly, outgoing and helpful. Scholars from all over the world visited Colombo to study Buddhism. Here Bapu could gain a firsthand knowledge of the ancient Buddhism as it had been preached by the Buddha as well as its actual practise.

Dharmapal selected the best vihara for Bapu: Shrimangalacharya's Vidyodaya Vihara at Maligakand, Colombo, now known as the Vidyodaya College because it was a renowned centre for the study of Pali as well as Sanskrit. A Pipal tree grown from the seeds of the original under which the Buddha had received enlightenment lent an air of authenticity and holiness to the institute. The tree as also an idol of Buddha had been enshrined and was regularly worshipped. The success and reputation of the College had been the fruition of the tireless hard work put in year after year by the founder.

Shrisumangalacharya was an excellent administrator and an erudite monk. He knew the Pali *Tipitaka* and a few other texts by heart. He never needed to open a book and read the topic under discussion. He could quote the page number and the line number from memory. In spite of acquiring such perfect mastery over the Buddhist scriptures he had remained impeccably modest and polite, free of the slightest touch of egoism or superciliousness. His love for other scholars was boundless. He never missed an opportunity to meet them and learn from them. He was deeply impressed by Bapu's sincerity and knowledge of Sanskrit. Surprisingly, Shrisumangalacharya had not chosen to be a monk of his free will. Monkhood had been thrust upon him by the current practises of Ceylonese society. He had been a sick child, unfit, in society's opinion, to bear the pressures of mundane existence. Such

children with an allegedly bleak future were given away to a vihara and initiated into monkhood for free upbringing and livelihood. Despairing of the child's future his parents too followed the custom. However, Shrisumangal took to the Order (Sangha) like duck to water. Forces of a mystifying destiny as also his incredible instincts made him surmount the hardest of odds, his frail health. Added to this was the absence of an educated monk at the vihara which he made his home. His innate love for knowledge drove him to teaching himself Sanskrit and Pali with rudimentary help from learned visitors. The practise had worked and given him rich dividends in terms of immaculate mastery over Pali and Sanskrit treatises. He had still kept it up.

Dharmapal, Shrisumangalacharya and Bapu forged a bond of friendship almost at first sight and it continued to get stronger and stronger as they got to know one another better. Shrisumangalacharya got a room behind the temple of the Buddha repaired specially for Bapu. The monks had their own quarters elsewhere. Since Bapu was not a monk, but only a student the Acharya had given him a separate room. He gave him access to the library and introduced him to monks who would teach him the scriptures.

The very next day Bapu got proof of the good feelings of the people for him. This was the 23rd of March, 1902, an Uposath or the sacred day for the Buddhists. The full moon day, the two Ashtamis, and the fourteenth day in the fortnight of the waning moon are the Uposath days, sacred days of Buddhism. Of these the full moon day is considered to be the most important because of its special significance to the followers of the Buddha. Buddha's first sermon was delivered at Banaras on this day and his *Mahaparinirvana* too took place on a full moon day at Kushinara.

True to tradition many monks had got together on this holy day at the vihara. They were having a meeting at the sermon hall of the Vihara officiated by Shrisumangalacharya, Dharmapal and a few others. Suddenly Dharmapal noticed Bapu amidst the audience. Darting from the rostrum he requested Bapu to give speech. Bapu dithered; he had never given a speech in his life. But Dharmapal pressed him on. The hall began to reverberate with whispers that he was a Hindu pundit. Finally Bapu acquiesced and gave a short extempore speech in Sanskrit. Master (Sthavira) Devmitra translated the speech for the benefit of the monks.

"The tree under which the Buddha was seated was destroyed by the king who hated Buddhism. But the branch of that tree that Mahendra,

the son of King Ashoka, had transported to Ceylon is still growing there unimpeded. This is exactly the condition of the tree of Buddhism today. The original tree grew in India. But kings and politicians with twisted minds destroyed it. Still the branch of this tree of Buddhism that the Master Mahendra brought here has continued to proliferate for more than two thousand years here. Right now I have no prerogatives to pass authoritative remarks on Buddhism. Right now I am but a curious person. Still I have strong hopes that as a disciple of Shrisumangalacharya I would soon acquire a sound knowledge of Buddhism." *Nivedan*, chapter twelve.

The crowd was impressed with the speech and spontaneously contributed some money, around three rupees, to help Bapu. Bapu was deeply ingratiated. He had also picked up a taste for public speaking. For the next Uposath he penned a poem in Sanskrit to be read out in the sermon hall. This too went down very well. Shrisumangalacharya had it published in the Sinhali script in the house magazine *Simhali Samay*.

Studying Pali was no easy matter. The entire collection of Pali books had been published in the Sinhalese script. So he had to begin by learning the script first. But he didn't take long to master it and soon began reading a plethora of Pali textbooks. He bought some English selfteachers and started teaching himself English. His life was not only gloriously meaningful, it was stable and bereft of stress. He was amidst soulmates, people who were devoted to Buddhism and had appreciation and reverence for him. He had come very close to achieving his goal.

Then suddenly the unforeseen happened. Out of blue the sense of belonging here that had permeated his heart left him. Severe nostalgia set in. He longed to make a home and have Bala and Manik there with him. The nostalgia must have been welling up for a while in his mind unknown to him ever since he left them. The last he had experienced it was during the train journey to Pune. Now it suddenly erupted at the sight of the coast and also by the congenial surroundings and the job opportunities that he could note.

A journey to Galle on the coastal train had triggered this nostalgia which was adversial to the pursuit of the goals he had stuck to amidst incredible hardships. The coast of that emerald island was too beautiful for words and strongly reminiscent of Goa. There were hills all along the coast and bananas and betel nuts grew bountifully and wildly there, exactly as they did on the coast of Goa. Bapu's mind had suddenly darted down the memory lane evoking images of his childhood; his

daily trip to the hills to graze cattle and collect dried cowdung to be used as fuel, the lunge he had learnt to take from the top of a betel tree to another like a monkey, dives in wells, rivers and the sea. Driven by his unusual urge he had hated that stultifying lifestyle. His search for certain ideals had taken toll of these and his family life. But his inner mind had always cherished these simple joys including those of a family.

Now a conflicting hunger had surfaced in his mind. He wanted to be with his wife and daughter. The longing had been made fiercer by the emergence of a complete and viable plan to achieve both these goals. Sanskrit was very highly valued here. He could easily find a job teaching Sanskrit, earn sixty or seventy rupees per month, rent a cheap house, get Bala and Manik over and side by side continue to study the Pali scriptures. The money would be more than adequate to take care of them... Bapu was absolutely floored by the way this subconscious mind had hit him unexpectedly with a whole hoard of suppressed desires. The plan was inches away from a *fait accompli*. All he had to do was to mention it to Shrisumangalacharya. In all probability the latter was mulling over such a plan already. Excellent Sanskrit scholars like Bapu were a rarity in the viharas. So possessed was he by this maddening impulse that he nearly broke his vow of silence with Dada and wrote to him to send Bala and Manik to Colombo by the next steamer.

That his mind could churn up emotions that were a secret to him and absolutely contrary to his beliefs and instructions was a startling revelation. Bapu hated himself for this sudden holocaust of desires that he considered to be the black side of human nature. He was in a hurry to shake them off. He badly craved to measure upto all those goals he had set for himself. If he failed now all his hardships and sacrifices would go vain. He would be proven to be a man who just made so much noise. He couldn't live with himself if he backed out in the face of certain success. He immediately got down to applying his will power to put a firm lid on the blazing emotions. He could do it after a while. But his confidence in himself as an undeterred goalfinder had been corroded. He feared that such impulse could grasp him again and next time they might prove to be uncontrollable. Bapu figured that barriers of mere will power were not going to be adequate, that more stringent measures needed to be applied to the unforeseen situation. He needed to put up stronger, invincible barriers around himself, those of monkhood.

Shrisumangalacharya was ready to grant Bapu's request to initiate

him in the Order. However the procedure for initiation required the consent of the mother or the wife of the aspirant. Bapu knew that Bala would die before giving such a consent. He had heaped enough sorrow on her by walking out on her and the baby. He did not want to aggravate her trauma by expecting a consent for his monkhood, the final severance from family, from her. Finally Shrisumangalacharya just waived the requirement and initiated Bapu into the Order as a novice (*shramanera*). Monkhood was equated with a new existence. Bapu needed to find a new name for himself. He came up with Dharmananda.

Henceforth would be strictly adhering to the four tenets of the religion taught by the Buddha, the Chaturyama Dharma; Nonviolence (Ahimsa), Truth (Satya), Desistance From Thefts (Asteya), and Renunciation of Possessions and Property (Aparigraha). He had been following these instinctively. But now he would constantly indulge in intensive introspections to see that he did not deviate from these rules. Two years before the advent of Buddhism these gospels had been taught by Parshwanath, the founder of Jainism. The Buddha added meditation and cerebration to these and prescribed multitudinous rules of conduct for monks and householders both. Bapu would claim later on that this accent on meditation and cerebration are points of distinction between the two great religions; Parshwanath believed in penance as the only means for fullfledged experience. The Buddha prescribed meditation and cerebration which are simpler forms of penance.

"Renounce property and family" had been one of the four main premises of the Buddha. He himself had done so, walked out on his one month-old son and wife and given up his right to the throne of Kapilavastu.

In a very small measure Bapu was following suit. His family just had to accept it if ever they came to know.

NINE

June 1903 - 1904

Monsoon had arrived in Goa with all its splendour and ferocity. Roaring black mountainous clouds tore through the belly of a murky sky like wild beasts. The sea, a matching dark grey, churned up by fearful foamlaced swells merged into the torrential sheets of rain at an indiscernible point. Rivers and streams were muddy and foamy. Hills, trees and houses got lashed incessantly and scrubbed to a gleaming green and white, both dripping more than the clouds themselves. The air was filled with a savage threnody of the wild wind and wilder breakers and was redolent with the wet smell of grass, moss' fallen leaves and sand. Birds croaked miserably, huddled up under the scant shelter of drenched leaves or roofs. The yards were flooded with dangling cucumbers and gourds.

Almost everybody was out, the bonded men and women toiling in the paddy fields, barebodied, heads protected grotesquely by caps of dry palm fronds, the masters watching them and the crops. No one had the respite to watch Nature's savage splendour and fury. Day in and day out they walked through the terrible slush, nectar for paddy, but bane for them all subjecting them to athlete's feet, diarrhoea, colds, coughs, eczemas, insect-bites, snake-bites and worse, asthma and tuberculosis. Yet everyone was unfailingly happy. Monsoon meant food and wealth.

Dada had not been able to go home for two weeks. There had been a sharp increase in the number of patients and he hadn't had the time to undertake the six mile trek. (He rarely engaged a horse buggy because he loved to walk). However, after two weeks of irrepressible nostalgia he just couldn't face another weekend at Mhapsa. Friday evening he closed shop at around six p.m, changed into dhoti and shirt and set out barefooted and bareheaded. Shoes or umbrellas were as effective against the torrential rain as a can of water for conflagration.

He walked resolutely taking long and firm strides that would help him retain his balance. Still every now and then he tripped over a deep puddle in the deluge and had to extricate himself from the slush by holding on to a tree trunk. This was no big deal, like everybody else he too loved the monsoon. The muddy road was lined on both sides by

pipal, banyan, gulmohor, teak, tamarind, mango, jackfruit, *bakul* and *booch* all covered thickly by winding creepers of vegetables and flowers of all kinds. Dada was often tempted to pick up a few vegetables or fruits just for the pleasure of it. He desisted, however confining himself wisely to the centre of the road to avoid the leafy slush on the shoulders. In spite of the fast enveloping darkness the road was not isolated. There was a thin stream of drenched people getting back home. Almost everyone recognized and greeted him.

By the time he reached the little turning in the road which led to the muddier and narrower trail going to Chikhali it was pitch dark. Here the grass had grown so high the trail was almost invisible. Dada could follow it only by the force of habit, almost instinctively. He had been walking along it ever since he learnt to walk. The sky was starless, the swirling clouds, trees, houses, huts, grass, everything reduced to vague shapes. Suddenly, his sharp senses, trained to catch the slightest sound and movement, be it from man, beast or reptile, picked up a presence nearby.

"Who is that? Speak up," he said, his voice more stern than usual.

"Nobody Go." The answering voice was a woman's, sweet but petulant. It had come through gnashed teeth.

"You want to die? Then jump in the sea. Death by a disease would be hell." Dada used special, invectives to bring round the ignoramus. He stepped into the thick grass heading towards the direction of the voice. After stretching his sharp brown eyes in the dark he could discern the faint silhouette of a young girl seated on a large stone under a jackfruit tree.

"Death by snakebite would be equally bad," he continued to shrill. He willingly gave free treatment to the poor. Yet quite a few dithered. As a doctor, combating ignorance and superstition was his most arduous task.

"I am dying of tuberculosis anyway." The voice was still girlish but matter-of-fact.

"Nonsense. Who told you? Have you been to a doctor? A tantrik? A quack?" Dada's words were like whip lashes. When no answer came he groped in the dark and managed to find her wrist. He was aghast to note its boniness. Her pulse was steady though.

"Leave me alone." The girl began to struggle. But her movements were touchingly feeble.. Dada let go of that tiny wrist.

"Eat gruel?" he queried.

"Sometimes."

"Why sometimes? Doesn't your mother feed you properly? Come, I will give you medicine." Dada strode on. He had identified her now as a very young Devdasi girl, age fourteen or fifteen. Her voice was beautifully modulated, pronunciations fine. He halted after a few steps. She was nowhere. He would send a couple of Kathkari women to look for her, he decided. Suicides amongst women were alarmingly common, caused by poverty and harassment by husbands and other members of the family. Dada didn't want to add one more to it. This one would prey on his conscience.

But she was there stalking side by side through the thick bushes.

"Go to the front verandah and wait for me," Dada said after he had reached the side of the vegetable garden. He himself turned left for the back door.

"Dada is here, Dada is here," an excited cry reverberated through the house. An inevitable pall hung over the house in the dark and wet evenings. Dada's arrival lifted it. Dada meant contact with a vast world, he meant saucy comments and titillating news. Bala rushed out to greet him and give him a towel and some dry clothes. Vainibai was close behind, but was glum as usual, possessed of the usual lethargy, bereft of the presence of mind to pour water over his feet or find his clothes. Kashba too hobbled there from the Big Room.

"Dada is here. Let us make something nice." In the kitchen Pachubai began to work her imagination.

Dada scrubbed his feet by the well with a stone without waiting for the boys to turn up and do it. Receding to the corner he wrapped himself in the *pancha*, removed his wet clothes and donned dry ones given to him by Bala.

"Coffee by the chullah?" Pachubai asked as he raced past the kitchen towards his wooden case kept in the Big Room now.

"Later, I have a patient waiting," Dada answered. He loved to sit by the blazing logs and sip hot milky coffee at all odd hours, a habit he had picked up at Lisbon.

The windows were closed and sewed up with palm fronds to keep the rain away and the tiles on the roof repaired before the onset of monsoon. The door of the verandah had been closed and the sitting moved to the Big Room. As Dada opened it a blast of rain cascaded in and drenched him again.

"Blast!" he rasped. "How could you be out in this rain? Are you there?"

"I am." The girl emerged from behind a clump of *champa* trees. She could have been a skeleton wrapped in wet rags and left out in the storm. She was extraordinarily fair and tall, with a perfect heartshaped face and delicately chiselled features, protuberant cheekbones, collarbone, shoulder bones, pointed knees and ankles as tiny as the wrists.

"Here. Have a pill thrice a day," Dada said, handing her a bottle.

"Are they for tuberculosis?"

"No, they are for strength. A tonic. Where do you live? I will visit you tomorrow and diagnose the trouble. Is there enough to eat in the house?"

"Yes, We live beyond the temple of Sateri."

"Who is we?"

"My mother, Subhadra and me"

"Is she harassing you?"

"She is trying. Three times a day you said?"

"Yes. And make sure you eat a good dinner. If you don't have any say so. I will arrange to send some."

"We have."

"What is your name?"

"Magha. What time will you come?"

"At daybreak."

The girl went away as silently as she had come leaving in her wake an almost inaudible rustle of leaves and grass.

"That was Pishi. Mother and daughter have come to stay by the temple." Kashba who had followed Dada informed. "Pishi" meant crazy.

"She is alarmingly weak. Probably starving."

"Story of their lives. What can we do?" Kashba muttered.

"Is that her real name? She said it was Magha."

"Could be. I don't really know. They have recently moved in here. The girl is seen wandering about at night. The Kathkaris call her Pishi."

Finding Magha's house was not difficult. There was a small brick structure, a room, a kitchen and a verandah, near the temple of Sateri. Mother and daughter had moved in there. Magha sat on the step getting drenched again. She had changed into a faded pigeon coloured sari and printed chintz choli. Her hair, long and thick, had been combed and left loose on her back. She rose to her feet to greet him, a gesture of reverence. Her movements were fluid but weak.

"Didn't I tell you not to get wet?" Dada roared.

"There is no dry place inside," Magha answered. She had a monotonous drone of a tone as if she was bereft of emotions.

The rain continued relentlessly. But a pale orange sun was peering through billowing clouds. The glimmer of the pink-hued light accentuated the hollows of her cheeks and the circles under her eyes. But her translucent saffron-crushed-in-cream complexion looked glossier. That colour and her height, five feet seven inches, made Dada surmise that she was of Portuguese parentage. The short, dark, slightly stooping woman who scuffed out now confirmed the conjecture.

"The Doctor came", the girl exclaimed, her amber eyes lit up with joy.

"Thank you. Doctor!" The mother stooped some more to touch Dada's feet.

"Don't do that!" Dada chided. He had an abhorrence for such exhibition of obsequiousness of the poor towards the rich, the younger for the older, customary though it was.

"What to do? I can never afford to pay your fees. I have to fall at people's feet and get things done. Just make her well, that is all I ask for," she said, her sunken eyes welling up with tears. She was not old, round thirty, barely fourteen or fifteen years older than her daughter. But had aged beyond her years, a dried prune face, sagging jowls and limbs and a sallow complexion. Her eyes were dead, the eyes of someone who had given up the fight of life. Dada was overly familiar with such eyes amidst Devdasis, locally called Bhavins, bonded labourers and such other types, slowly snuffed out by the pressures of living.

"You must be a newcomer here or you would know that I do not charge the people here for my treatment," Dada answered simply. He didn't. The rich were his cousins and the poor couldn't afford anything.

"May God bless You. You are getting drenched out there."

"And I will be till you invite me inside," Dada quipped. His sternness was replaced by a sense of humour.

"I didn't know," Subhadra was flustered. That he was willing to step into their house, an impure household, came as a shock. Magha had already traipsed inside and spread a mat over one of the few dry spots in the house. Dada folded his umbrella and followed her. He had been attired today in his professional clothes, trousers, long coat and shoes.

"Care to have some gruel?" the girl asked after Dada had sat crosslegged over the mat. Mischievous glints had appeared in her eyes

now. She was leading him on testing his wish and strength to break the social barriers of untouchability.

"Why not? But very little. I am not hungry yet." This was Dada's stock answer whenever he was offered anything at homes which were considered to be socially lowly. This was his way of showing them that he considered them to be his equals.

The girl stepped into the minuscule kitchen.

"What are your names? Where are you from?" Dada asked Subhadra who had squatted on the cowdung-plastered floor before him.

"I am Subhadra. She is Pishi."

"Why Pishi? You pocketed a nice name for yourself and she is Pishi? Is that fair?" Dada admonished. He had failed to note the slightest hint of madness in the girl's lustrous eyes.

"I had named her Magha. But everybody calls her Pishi. She wanders around. She has no interest in anything. She is rude to people. So they retaliate by calling her Pishi."

It was not hard to read between the lines; the girl did not want to go into prostitution. This was the story of their life. Devdasi mothers found themselves out of work at some point in their life. Then they shoved their daughters into the oldest profession. Nowadays an alternative had been found which was better than opening shop. Rich merchants and princes frequently picked up young girls as their lifelong companions. There were agents who had specialized in finding this kind of clientele. A very few had made it to the stage or got themselves established as renowned singers. But this too had been achieved with the help of their patrons. If the daughters did not comply the mothers were known to resort to all kinds of coercive tactics, starving, beating and just outright sale.

"Are you starving her or harassing her in any way?"

"I am not, I swear by God. She starves herself. If only she fills up a little bit I could find a good master for her and then we could both live in luxury. I am not asking her to please one and all. Allow me to find a good merchant is all I am asking for. That is not too much. After all no one is going to marry her. Now everyone is calling her mad and the proposals are getting rarer."

"Is she married to God?"

"She is not. God does not help. I am married to God. For many years I sang and danced in the temple for the price of a few rough saris and some food. Now I am old and replaced by another."

"How do you live? Do you have an income?" Dada reckoned

that she might own an orchard or a paddy field. Some of them were lucky to have one given to them by their patrons.

"A small one. Damubab gives me enough for my needs. He installed me here."

Damubab, a trader at Kamurlee, was also an agent for the rich in Mumbai. He had taken mother and daughter under his wings. Every now and then he turned up with a good proposal for Magha. This invariably led to a vicious tantrum on the girl's part. Of late Damubab had been threatening that he would cut off all aid. He was at the tether end of his patience, he screamed. Meanwhile the girl had become paranoid. She had taken to wandering around at night. She frequently refused to have her meals.

Magha was soon out carrying a brass bowl of steaming hot gruel and a mango pickle over a jackfruit leaf.

"If only I had known you would stay for gruel I would have made some nice *bhaji*," Subhadra muttered. Her words were bereft of the ring of conviction. Dada didn't think she ever cooked *bhaji* in that squalour. Damubab must be giving them some rice and gruel must be the only food they lived on.

Dada liked the makeshift leafy spoon the girl had shown the enterprise of putting in the bowl.

"That is innovative," he said picking it up and scooping a little gruel with it.

"Otherwise you would have to wash your hand by holding it under the showers," Magha answered simply. Dada smiled.

"Why do you roam at night and in pelting rain? It is not good for your health."

"The house leaks too. It is too small. It is smothering in here. Outdoors is better."

"Look! You have to eat properly. You are not tubercular now. But you might be soon if you continue to starve yourself and wander in the rain at night," he appealed.

"I don't want to fatten myself for a merchant." She did have a point there.

"Certainly not." "But she is conniving with Damubab to send me to Mumbai."

"Do you have an alternative plan for making a livelihood?" Subhadra hissed.

"I can live off fruits and berries."

"I will send some rice. With no strings attached," Dada added

as Subhadra gave him a half questioning half hopeful look, "I am doing it all the time. Let her get well first, then we will think of her livelihood."

"Take her word that she will not sell me," Magha rasped. A bag of bones though she was she did have a lot of fight in her.

"Come on Subhadra! Give your word that you will leave her alone."

"How much rice would you send?"

"I will see that you do not starve. Also give your word that you will not entertain Damubab any more".

"I give my word," Subhadra muttered. Her tone made it quite clear that she did not intend to keep it for long. She was totally hollow inside. Dada finished the gruel, then returned home.

"Good timing. We were about to serve gruel to the men." Bala said.

"I have had it."

"Where?" Curiosity was not a crime in Goa.

"At Subhadra's. She and her daughter are newcomers in Chikhali." Bala could see nothing wrong in this. Dada had food with everyone, Kathkaris, Devdasis, Muslims, Christians, all. He didn't observe the rules of untouchability.

"Do you mean Pishi?"

"I do. But I wouldn't like to call her by that name. Subhadra thinks she is mad and the girl thinks she has got tuberculosis. There is nothing wrong with her. She is starved, that is all. Send them a sack of rice."

A sack? That was a lot of rice. Bala was stunned. But she was quick to comply. To his family and patients Dada was God.

At Colombo Bapu gained perfect mastery over the Pali language and the Sinhalese and Brahmi script. Within a span of eight to ten months, he read the three most important scriptures, the *Tipitakas* and a substantial number of books which were commentaries on them. The *Tipitakas* alias three baskets are: *Vinaya-pitaka* (rules for the monks) *Sutta-pitaka* (teachings of the Buddha) and *Abhidhamma-pitaka* (Metaphysics). He was now looking for a book on Yoga. He had read Patanjali's *Yogasutra* at Banaras and was now curious to find out if a similar book existed in Pali too. Now that his coffers of knowledge had been substantially filled he had become keenly interested in direct spiritual experience via meditation.

A monk named Priyaratna gave him a copy of the *Visuddhimagga*

(Vishuddhimarga, the road to purification, in Sanskrit) and stated that the book contains a good commentary on the Yogashastra.

Visuddhimagga was written by Buddhaghosha in the first half of the 5th century. He was a Hindu, but converted to Buddhism after Revat, a Buddhist philosopher defeated him in debate. Revat asked him to go to Sri Lanka and translate *Atthakatha* in Pali. The Sinhalese monks insisted Buddhaghosha write a work on Patanjali's yoga, before he touched *Atthakatha*. So he wrote *Visuddhimagga*. Bapu read it cursorily. But wasn't satisfied, probably because at that time he was still not well versed in Pali and failed to comprehend all those detailed instructions about meditation and concentration. Four or five months later he found himself reading it again, more for its Brahmi script than for its contents. But now suddenly the book caught his fancy. He read the first two parts twice and was overcome with an unshakable urge to follow the directions of these yogic skills in undisturbed peace. This was hard to find at the Sinhalese viharas pulsating with discussions and other scholarly activities. By this time Bapu's health had begun to deteriorate too. Finding vegetarian food was a problem. The Sinhalese people used *ambilkadha*, dry fish powder, in almost all their foods. This made most of the food unfit for Bapu's consumption. One of the commandments for a monk was strict vegetarianism. He was forced to live on plain rice. The old unrest to move on had begun to obsess him too.

Dharmadas, a newcomer to the Vidyodaya Vihara suggested Kushinara, the place where the Buddha had left this world for his *Mahaparinirvana*, as the most ideal environment for meditation. His guru Mahavir had built a rest house there. Mahavir, though a wrestler by profession in his younger days, was one more person whose destiny had taken a quirky turn a few years back. He was proficient in wrestling and other manly sports. Hence he was a hot favourite of the Maharaja Malharrao Gaekwad of Baroda and had been engaged as the prince's companion. In 1875 Malharrao was accused of having plotted to poison Colonel Friar, who was the British Resident, Baroda, and dethroned. He was despatched to Chennai and lived there till his death.

Mahavir had continued to be with him. After the death of the prince he visited Sri Lanka, became friendly with some monks there and became a monk himself. Later on he went back to Calcutta. A Sinhalese man at Calcutta had left twenty rupees per month in his will for monks who lived in his hut. Mahavir took up residence there. For a long time the money left by the monk had been kept in the treasury

of the government. But now it had been released for the benefit of the Buddhists in general.

He had planned rest houses for the Buddhist pilgrims at Buddhagaya or Kashi. But in neither of these places could he procure land close to holy Buddhist places. Finally he bought a farm at Kushinara, the place where the Buddha's *Mahaparinirvana* (supreme Nirvana) had taken place. [This place is near Kasaya in the Gorakhpur zilla] With a little additional finance from Khejari, a rich Burmese trader and patron of the Buddhists, Mahavir managed to construct a rest house there.

Bapu was now possessed of a driving enthusiasm to visit this place of the Master's Grand Departure. He confided his plans to Shrisumangalacharya for whom this was a severe jolt. Still he did not withhold his consent. His was one more name added to the long trail of disappointed gurus and mentors that Bapu had left behind and would do so unfailingly in the not too distant future. Dharmapal's father bought Bapu a second class train ticket. His other friends gave him simple presents like a tin of biscuits. He wouldn't accept anything else, not even money. He was a novice and would travel as one, wearing the three garments ordained for a monk and carrying his begging bowl.

This time Chennai did not pose a problem. He was familiar with the road to Singaravelu's house, moreover he was fluent in English. Still, he was apprehensive, for Singaravelu's behaviour had been at times unnecessarily offensive. He had visited the Vidyodaya College once and had stirred up a hornet's nest for Bapu by stating to Devamitra Sthavira:

"Bapu is a Brahmin and Brahmins in India are very cunning. They are not trustworthy. Even if Kosambi impresses you as a simple soul don't you trust him. Remember that he is a Brahmin."

Only during the course of the evening sermon when Devamitra had reported them as a statement of facts had Bapu been put abreast of Singaravelu's baseless opinions. Bapu was stunned and hurt. He had always prided himself on being free of manipulation and other black traits. He had never been cunning towards Singaravelu or anyone else. During the two days that Bapu had stayed at Chennai Singaravelu had been most helpful. In the light of those sweet days this malicious comment was totally confusing and uncalled for.

However, for the time being Bapu had no other helpmate at Chennai. So Singaravelu it was. He graciously kept Bapu as a house guest. But made it clear that he would be in no position to help financially. Pretty soon Singaravelu came up with another plan for

Bapu. He moved Bapu to the premises of the Baudhashrama. The Baudhashrama was founded by the neo-Buddhists, the low caste Hindus who had converted themselves to Buddhism. Covert hostility had been simmering between the older members of the Mahabodhi Sabha and these newcomers. The Sabha organized but one function, the celebration of the full moon day in Vaishakh, the day of the Buddha's Enlightenment. The expenses for this festival were footed by the Burmese merchant Mongshwe. This focus on fun and frolic aggravated the newcomers' discontent who desired to have regular sermons or speeches on a serious religious subject.

On Sunday evenings Bapu or Singaravelu or someone else gave a talk on a religious subject. The talks soon came to enjoy public patronage on a massive scale. Hindus and Christians too turned up to listen to them. Bapu enjoyed these meetings. Yet he got highly irked by his present life style in more than one way. He was not getting any nearer to Kushinara. His health was even worse than was at Colombo, rheumatism added now to the list of his other maladies. Worst of all, his tolerance for Singaravelu's barbs, though targeted at others, had been worn through. One such infuriating generalization was.

"The monks are useless. They are like the Egyptian Mummies."

Bapu had interpreted such vituperations as ignorable idiosyncracies in Singaravelu's nature. Nevertheless these snide comments soon increased Bapu's dissatisfaction with his living conditions, which were far from ideal in the first place. He was dying to get back to Calcutta and thence to Kushinara. However Singaravelu was taking no interest whatsoever in finding a sponsor for his train ticket to Calcutta. On the contrary, he was slowly but steadily propelling Bapu towards taking deep roots in the Mahabodhi Sabha and a long stay at Chennai. It was a maddening no-win situation.

TEN

August 1902

Dada was in love. He walked to Chikhali two or three times a week and stayed over at least for a day. He caught fish in the creek and meandered in the hills with Magha. People saw them both wading in the creek, gamboling and grinning happily, his dhoti and her sari tucked up high above their knees, a large handkerchief in their hands to cover and pick up wriggling fish. Whenever the village urchins went to the hills to eat wild fruit and berries they came across these two climbing trees or bending thorny branches of the berries. Sometimes they sat on stones hidden by the tall grass along the bank of the river watching birds, feet splashing water around, hair windswept. Except for a soft gleam in Dada's brown eyes he had not changed much, at least externally.

Magha had. She had been metamorphosed into a ravishing beauty. Her delicate bone structure was covered with creamy flesh. Her eyes danced, her lips were quick to part in an endearing smile and her monotonous drone had got infused by an exquisite range of emotions. She oiled and plated her thick long hair and wore enormous flower wreathes over it. Those faded and tattered Saris had been replaced by new Belgaum cotton silks. Mother and daughter still lived in that decrepit house. But twice a day a mouthwatering aroma of fish exuded from there.

There were whispers all over Goa. But no head on confrontation. Except for one branch all the Lauds had gone elsewhere. The newcomers, Hindus as well as Christians, did not care to launch at attack on Dada who was a good doctor and a lovable person, always taking an initiative to clear up a feud or a family problem. Anyway he would not be a trendsetter in this respect; keeping a woman was an ancient practice.

One day Vainibai's father and brother paid them a visit. They too did not refer directly to the matter. But sat for well over two hours chatting of this and that, their faces morose and hands fidgeting. Dada's unconcealed attachment had raised a wall between the two families which neither could traverse. The thought at the back of everyone's mind was, if Dada wanted to have another woman in his life he had every right to do so. Neither contemporary society nor religion had

placed a ban on it. Anyway nobody had the prowess to reason with Dada. He always did exactly what he wanted to do.

Vainibai continued to mope and howl. Since long Dada had taken to sleeping over a mattress in the Big Room or the front verandah. Now that his wooden medicine case was out in the Big Room he had cut off all contact with their room. He had plans to build a floor over the Big Room. This would be his sitting room and a study cum bedroom. He would receive his friends and patients here. Here he would have stone slabs for floor. No cowdung.

The monsoon had reached its fag end. The steady and massive downpour had stopped leaving in their wake pleasant and refreshing drizzles. Trees and bushes had blossomed into a riot of multi-coloured flowers and tiny fruits. Parrots, woodpeckers, bulbuls, love birds, sunbirds, kingfishers, pheasants, *titwis* and many other winter birds darted around adding more exotic colours to the landscape and a variety of notes to the gentle whooshing of breeze and sea. Rivers and brooks had calmed down, their water still ruddy, but no more foaming. Paddy fields were a captivating yellow-green, rice corns dangling gracefully in midair. Soon they would be sundried to a crisp yellow and cut and ground under the hooves of cattle. The sun was intermittent, blotted now and then by the voluminous fleeting clouds, its rays the colour of pale honey.

Seated on the verandah emptily Kashba heard the sound of the familiar flapping of Yedu's rows. Now that the creek was no more tumultuous Yedu's service was back. Shambling to the edge of the verandah Kashba could sight Dada dressed in trousers, shirt, hat and pump shoes march through the green foliage.

"Hey! Dada is here. Don't you finish all that gruel," he shouted through the door of the Big Room. Then stumbled down the steps to receive him.

"Gruel can wait. Let us talk. Has Bappa left?" Dada said. He sprinted up the steps, for once omitting the procedure of washing his hands and feet by the back door.

"No. Everybody is still here."

"Fine! Get them."

This time they had a family meeting in Kashba's room. Bala who had turned into a behemoth now was present too.

"Baba! I have been deeply attached to Magha." Dada said gravely. They all nodded matching their graveness to his. Mangu, the joker, wanted to point out that this was an understatement. But he did

not deem it appropriate to defuse the gravity of the mood.

Kashba was upset, even though externally he tried to remain calm and collected. He had supported Dada at all junctures of his life. He had fulfilled Dada's wish to go to Lisbon to study medicine. But he was not quite sure whether he had the courage to bless Dada's intended alliance with Magha. They had all seen it coming for a while. However he also knew that Dada always told, never asked. Even though a permissible practice, to Kashba it seemed to be in a bad taste. Still he knew that he was not upto bridling Dada.

"But I don't want to keep her like the others are doing it" Dada began.

All eyebrows got raised in unison as though there had been a military order to do it. What did Dada mean? He didn't want to keep Magha? Then what was all this frolicking for? They were intrigued.

"She will be like my wife, second one. She will have free access to all parts of our house. You will talk to her and make her at ease here. She is very good. I don't want her to be treated as an untouchable."

Now that was a bombshell! Devdasis never entered anybody's homes. Sometimes in their old age they did some chores like cleaning and grinding, but always on the back verandah, never inside. Like the Kathkaris they were served food on a leaf plate, never a brass plate. These were mighty strictures and Dada was venturing to defy them.

"I would have loved to get married to her. But I know that no priest would do this. Priests would argue with me and drive me crazy. I don't want to disturb my peace of mind," Dada continued.

"Have you given her your word?" Kashba asked after a while in a hollow tone.

"I have given word to myself. If you give me your blessings for what I have in my mind I would bring her here and officially introduce her to you. Otherwise..."

Otherwise what? Would he cut off all relationship with his family?

"Otherwise I would take her to Mhapsa. She would live with me there in my house. I am going to build one soon. You will be as welcome there as before,"

"Tongues will wag," Bala spoke up.

"They are wagging already. Tongues wag for any reason. They wagged for Bapu who has left for a magnanimous purpose. We should not heed them. They stop wagging after a while. See how that order for ostracization died down."

"That was different. That was a silly custom. It needed to be changed. People did not hold against you because you are a doctor and cure diseases."

"This one needs to be changed too. It is worse than that silly custom. It is horrendous. To like a woman and not give her the status of a wife is wrong. It is taking undue advantage of their helpless situation. I don't want to do it. Curing diseases of society is as important as treating those of the body. If I fail to show this much courage no one ever will."

Dada had a point there. He lived fifty years ahead of his times. They will just have to stand by him and justify his decision.

"Get her," Kashba said.

"Thank you, Baba!" Breaking a rule Dada rose to his feet and touched Kashba's feet, then he strutted out to get Magha.

"God's favour is so disproportionate!" Bala yelled. Large tears pouring down her wan eyes.

Mangu cast her a questioning glance. All others were lost in their own dejected thoughts.

"Shouldn't he have given a little more love to Bapu and a little less to Dada?"

"A little less would have made no difference. Dada is upto his ears in love."

"I know. But a little less and he would have just kept her not married her. I mean, sought to keep her as a wife."

"We will all need extraordinary courage now to face the public wrath and calumny," Mangu averred.

"Bapu has already knocked it into us. Now we will just use it for Dada."

"The Kathkaris would be like hornets stinging day in and day out."

Surprisingly the Kathkaris were the ones who always measured people by the traditional strictures, even their masters, even though they had been outlawed by the religion and as such were beyond the jurisdiction of Hinduism themselves. They were like children bereft of malice, at the same time irrepressible, candidly reiterating whatever they saw, sensed and opined.

"Let us pray for strength," Kashba mumbled, his face white like a lily. There was nothing else they could do.

Driven to desperation Bapu suddenly had a brainwave. Why not approach some Burmese students for financial help? They revered him

and had been attending his lectures regularly. Bapu figured that they would not be willing to buy him a ticket to Calcutta. But might agree to pay for his passage to Rangoon. At that point he didn't care where he went. He just wanted to get out and quickly. Burma was a Buddhist country and he was sure a visit there would be beneficial. He argued his case convincingly.

"Buddhist scriptures state that a monk has to live with other monks. I am unable to obey this precept for there are no monks at Chennai. I understand that there are many *viharas* in Burma. If somehow I could reach there this flaw would be rectified and my studies too would receive a fillip."

That did it. The Burmese students raised enough money for Bapu's boat fare to Rangoon. He left on the 12th of March.

At Rangoon he spent the Ambaruktaram Vihara which was close by. In the morning he contacted Mrs. Laong, a very learned lady, the wife of the ex-Accountant General of Burma and a patron of the Buddhists in Burma. She had founded a school for girls where she had made it a point to include lessons about the Buddhist gospels in the curriculum.

Mrs. Laong directed Bapu to the Chundo Chaun Vihara at Chimidine a town on the outskirts of Rangoon. Here Bapu met Dnyana-triloka who was to be his friend throughout his stay in Burma. Born Antony Goete, this German musician had got himself initiated as a Buddhist novice and was studying the Pali scriptures at the Chundo Chaun Vihara.

"You would get on like a house afire, I reckon," Mrs Laong had said while mentioning him. She had reckoned correctly.

"He was born in a good family. Since childhood he had a penchant for religion. So he ran away to the monastery of a Catholic padre. Later on in his youth he studied the sciences and became a confirmed atheist. He loved and studied music too. After he completed his education he specialised in music. He played excellently on the violin. This instrument turned out to be of great use to him. He played the violin in a public place at cities like Constantinople, Port Said, Mumbai, etc. and collected money for the next league of his journey. Once he played the violin at the Band Stand, Mumbai, for half an hour and the Europeans gathered there literally showered notes over him. In that half an hour he received forty rupees. He was offered the job of a band master at a salary of eight hundred rupees somewhere in Northern India. But he didn't accept it for by now his mind was focused on

Buddhism. Dnyantriloka did not fully confide into me all the reasons that drew him to Buddhism. But I figured that after reading the books of the German metaphysicists like Schopenhauer etc. he must have overcome with love for Buddhism. After he reached Rangoon Antony Goete [the future Dnyantriloka] parted company with his violin and collection of songs. He became a novice and lived at the Chundi Chaun Vihara. Due to his excellent grasping power he mastered the Pali language little by little only on the strength of a dictionary and a grammar. I did help him somewhat. But my contribution to his education was negligible compared to his own efforts." *Nivedan*," chapter thirteen.

As before Bapu continued to live by begging at his new residence. Like the Sinhalese the Burmese too were nonvegetarians. They even ate beef. Once again this posed a grave problem. He and Dnyantriloka who too had become vegetarian had to live on rice and milk. Fed up of this tasteless diet they often boiled leaves of trees with an onion and mixed rice with the resultant strained soup. Whether it was savoury or not it was definitely unwholesome.

Still this predicament was vastly compensated by other advantages. The atmosphere at the *viharas* was wonderful. The landscape was green with paddy fields that rolled to the horizon. One could study here and meditate to one's heart. All the Buddhists festivals were celebrated with a deal of enthusiasm and religious fervour here. *Stupas*, *Chaityas* and temples were constantly renovated for such occasions.

Another stroke of good luck for Bapu was getting Master Kumar, the main teacher at the Chundi Chaun Vihara, for guru. He upgraded Bapu to fullfledged monkhood when he noted the latter's knowledge of Pali and Sanskrit.

"A highly qualified person like Dharmanand should not rot as a novice. He deserves to be a monk," he said. These were the sweetest words Bapu had ever heard. They were his first recognition, unsolicited and intrinsic.

Bapu needed to go through a ceremony called Upasampada (formal initiation as a monk). For this Master Kumar himself found a sponsor who happily paid the fees for the ceremony.

By all laws of logic Bapu should have stayed at the Chundi Chaun Vihara happily and for a long time. But he didn't. There was nothing new to be learnt here. The drive to go to Kushinara had been obsessively present in his mind and filled him with crushing disquietude. Finally he crumbled and confided his wish to Master Kumar. Master Kumar tendered no objection. But he pointed out that a monk could

leave the *vihara* where he had been initiated into the Order only after a stint of five years with a guru. Bapu contended that such a rule was not laid down anywhere in the sacred books, that generally monks were known to have stayed for five years at a *vihara* and studied with the same guru, hence the convention not to cut short this period. Bapu pointed out instances recorded in the Scriptures wherein the monks had departed from their chosen *viharas* much earlier. Bapu held that the emphasis here was on the completion of studies, not on a specific period of time. The chief of the *vihara* were not very happy about this for they valued convention more than the written word. Still after debating the point a little more Master Kumar conceded. But naturally, under the circumstances, he was reluctant to find the requisite boat fare for the departing monk.

Bapu did not give up. He approached some Bengali Buddhist merchants. When they found out that Bapu desired to visit Kushinara they gladly came up with money for a third class passage to Calcutta.

Bapu reached Calcutta in the first week of January, 1904. But didn't find any of his old friends there. Dharmapal was on a tour of Japan and America. The affairs of the Mahabodhi Sabha had been entrusted to a Sinhalese man named Anavaratna. Bapu could have contacted some old friends or charitable rich men and raised money for a ticket to Kushinara. But once again he was buffeted by that old nostalgia. He would contain it by visiting Mumbai, he decided. There was no question of visiting his family for the self-imposed barriers of monkhood were still intact and he decided to walk all the way there, a matter of seven hundred miles. If on the way he found someone who would buy him the ticket well and good. Otherwise walking it was going to be. Finding food was no problem. No matter where he lived he had always begged for his food.

Two days after he had reached Calcutta he left it, walking along the railway tracks leading to Nagpur. He lived that day on some bananas and bread that he had bought with him in his sack and spent the night under a tree. The next morning he reached Andul station and walked into the city. Here he ran into a kindhearted lawyer, Sheetalprasad, who treated him to a hot meal before midday. (Being a monk Bapu did not partake of any food after midday.) He also had a dip in the local pond. Sheetalprasad offered him some money. But Bapu didn't accept it explaining that as a monk he couldn't keep money with him.

Back at the station he contacted the station master who put him on a goods train to Midnapore. In Midnapore Bapu accidentally ran

into some friends of Krishnaprasad, a local prince who was a Sanskrit scholar. The friends introduced Bapu to the Prince who was aptly impressed by Bapu's command over that ancient language. The Prince took him to his home in the city and suggested that he should accompany him to his home in the village. But Bapu didn't want to deviate from his chosen itinerary. The Prince bid him adieu with a heavy heart, but bought him a ticket to Nagpur.

ELEVEN

1904

The dock at Bhau's Point had been bustling with activity since 8 a.m. on that day in February, 1904. A steamer had arrived from Murgaon, Goa and anchored in deep waters a few yards away from the docking area. A band of cackling, shrieking and sweating seafarers circled round it shoving beleaguered passengers and their battered baggage into the tiny boats, they rowed, then dumped them on the shore. Dada and Magha who had bagged a rowboat all to themselves landed in comparative comfort.

"To think that I was destined to have Mumbai shown to me by you and not by Damubab or his client!" Magha chirped gleefully, pressing Dada's hand.

"That is because you had the sense to wait for me under the mango tree on that stormy night," Dada answered, wrapping his arm round her. The sternness had drained off his broad face. He wore an endearing, soft expression. Now that they enjoyed anonymity at least on this little rowboat, they had slipped into the roles of lovebirds. Nearly two years had passed since they had first met at Chikhali, But they were still as much in love as then despite a socially insecure relationship.

She was strikingly turned out in a cotton silk nine-yard sari, a chintz blouse, not a choli, which was long and had puffed sleeves, and English shoes. Her thick hair was tied in a chignon and circled with a wreath of pink roses which she had wrapped in a cloth and carried with her from Mhapsa. Dada had been very good to her. She had her own house and undreamed of luxuries. His friends treated him like his wife. She even wore a Mangalsutra round her neck. She had made history amidst the Devdasis though she didn't rub shoulders with them any more. Dada had got Subhadra too to live with them. But she had passed away a few days back.

On the dock they were greeted by Antoine Rodriguez and his wife Rosa. Antoine was the son of Dada's friend in Mhapsa, twenty four, short, but debonair. Rosa was a couple of years younger, petite and pregnant. In spite of the disparity in their ages the couples got on very well, chatting and jesting. Dada had innumerable friends and

relatives in Mumbai who would have probably accepted Magha as a live-in houseguest and their equal. The social environment in Mumbai was more liberated than that at Goa. But Dada had been reluctant to take any chance. He feared that there was still a probability that they would turn him down and this in turn would lead to the splintering of perfectly good relationships. He had built a house at Mhapsa and had been living there with her for the past two years. He had added a floor to the house at Chikhali and took her there with him whenever he visited his family. People had not held it against him. They had accepted the premise that anything can be expected from Dada. At the same time a scandal had erupted and not quite died down. Antoine, a Catholic and a Mumbaite, did not have such social restrictions imposed on him.

Antoine had engaged a buggy and kept it waiting to avoid the scrimmage that was welling up now. In a few minutes' time the baggage was loaded into it and the foursome was off to Antoine's house in Colaba. Even though this was Magha's first visit to Mumbai she had by now been deeply steeped in the social etiquette of the sophisticated. Dada's friends and patients had not held his private life against him. They freely visited him and accepted tea or coffee served in porcelain cups. Dada had installed European furniture in the house, two sofas, a dining table and chairs, a bed and three cabinets. Only the kitchen was done in the ancient traditional style. He had also registered it as her house.

"I am not keeping you. You are keeping me," he was fond of teasing her in their private moments. Externally he had become more stern than he was. This facade was an outcome of the stifling and even adversary social environment.

"This should stop you from kicking me out," Magha regaled. She had changed radically from the sad-eyed, scrawny social rebel to a beautiful, poised and *soignee* housewife. She was always modishly turned out in Belgaum silk saris or Mumbai prints. Her thick black hair was knotted into a glossy chignon the size of a child's football and innovatively circled with fragrant wreathes of jasmine, *champa* and even roses.

Antoine gave them a room by the front verandah. His house was an exact replica of the smaller house at Betim, a roofed cluster of rooms and a kitchen and a toilet block at the back.

After a simple lunch of fried pomfret, prawn curry, kokam kadhi, rice and mixed vegetables from the yard the two girls left in a buggy to shop in the fort area. Dada took a buggy for Charni Road to Bhau

Dabholkar's house. Dabholkar was a friend's friend and Dada had fixed up an approximate meeting time with him. There was another closeknit group here called the Mumbai Saraswats. Dabholkar was one of them.

A few day's back Dada had run into a friend of Dabholkar's who had reported that the latter had run into Bapu at some solicitor's place, that he had become a *Bhikku*, but had won everyone's heart by his knowledge of Sanskrit and another language called Pali. Obviously, the friend had commented, Bapu had achieved what he had set out to achieve, that he no more deserved to be the target of his friends' sly taunts.

This was awful news. Dada knew that a *Bhikku* meant a Buddhist monk, one who had renounced each and every worldly responsibility. This coupled with the realization that Bapu had come so close to Goa, yet not bothered to visit them, had been shattering. Dada just didn't have the heart to break this Bala, not yet any way. He had no doubts whatsoever that somehow the news would travel to her in the very near future. All the same he would get it checked and double checked personally before her world crumbled. Dabholkar received Dada with warmth. After the customary cup of tea was ordered and the initial banter done with Dada got down to brass tacks:

"I am the brother-in-law of Bapu Kosambi. I am interested in finding out information about him. I understand you had met him a few days back."

"I had. Very briefly. At a party at solicitor Dixit's I had a discussion with him about the philosophy of the *Upanishads*. He talked about the Buddha's philosophy too. An extremely well read man. And what a life story! Barely twenty five, and he has crossed the length of the country on a shoestring budget. I am deeply aggrieved that he has become a monk. We, the Saraswats, have lost a scholar and a sincere and learned worker," Dabholkar answered. He had not hesitated to convey this impression candidly to Bapu himself.

"I am not thinking of the community right now, but of my sister. He left her when she was sixteen and their daughter a month old. When would he complete his studies? Where did he go? Does he have the intention of coming back? We were always given to understand that after he has completed his studies he would do so." Dada's voice was tremulous. He could see already that Bala was doomed permanently to the life of a deserted wife.

"Well, we didn't ask him in so many words. We assumed that

he wouldn't. Monkhood has a finality about it. At least that is how it is in Hinduism. I have no idea about Buddhist rules. But we could visit Dixit. He might have more information about him."

Dabholkar took Dada to Dixit's office. But Dixit could add nothing more. He was not Bapu's old friend as Dada had conjectured. He had a friend, Advocate Madhavrao Padhye, in Nagpur. They had all been living in tents outside the city because of a bout of plague there. One fine day Bapu had suddenly walked into their colony. He was on way to Mumbai, but wanted to see Nagpur, he had explained. Padhye was inordinately impressed by Bapu's sincerity and knowledge. He had sent a telegram to Dixit requesting him to show Bapu around Mumbai. Dixit had received him at the station, kept him with him for a couple of days and bought his onward ticket. All he could tell was that Bapu had proceeded to Kushinara via Baroda, Indore, Gwalior and Banaras. He had old friends here, friends who had helped him go to Banaras for studying Sanskrit.

"Would writing to these friends help us locate him?"

"I wouldn't know. May be if you sent someone there you would find these friends."

"To think that he came so close to home and didn't pay us a visit! That he intended to make all these halts to look up people who are surely less important than his family! He was but a night away from us by steamer."

"We didn't talk about it. But I could offer a surmise. Family means temptation. He is absolutely dedicated. He didn't want to undertake anything that would lead him to swerve from his chosen path. Right now he is anaesthetized. He thinks of nothing but his spiritual achievements. If he sets eyes on his family the sluiceways of his will power might collapse. He definitely does not want to risk such an impediment. He wants to adhere to his chosen path."

"Isn't the family his chosen path?" Dada's voice faltered. He lost colour. He could see that arguing with these people who had no stable place in Bapu's life was pointless. From here onwards everybody would justify and side with Bapu and make light of the trauma suffered by Bala.

"Did he choose this of his own will? He must have got married at a very early age."

Yes, and with reluctance!

"He renounced his family. That was a sacrifice that he made." Dixit said, continuing his save-Bapu's-image crusade.

"And who do you think was the sacrificial lamb? My sister!" Dada who had been conducting the debate on an impersonal level wailed instinctively, all his controls suddenly haywire.

"We have as much sympathy for her as we have reverence for him. These things happen. Learn to accept them and live with them. Right now we are all going through a social turmoil. The fusion of ancient Indian and modern British culture is leading to unforeseen situations, hungers and struggles. Appreciate and revere Bapu. He has the flame, we don't! It is still burning in his heart. He is a rare type. He is the man from the sun. We are common people despite our financial successes. People like him alone can help us get out of the rut of the middle ages and lunge into a better future."

"He should not scorch his wife, his family." Dabholkar shrugged his shoulders. "He scorches himself too," he said.

"Where is this place Kushinara? Is it on the map?"

"We don't know. It was the place of the Buddha's final departure from this world, he had said, somewhere near Banaras. He wanted to meditate there in absolute tranquility."

Meditate! Not study. His studies were over. Meditation could be timeless. It couldn't have a deadline. He would never return!

Dixit and Dabholkar had nothing but sympathy for Dada and his sister. They would love to contribute something for Bala's upkeep and the child's education, they averred.

"Thank you very much. But they are very well looked after. They do not need money, but a husband and a father." Dada rose and bid adieu. There was nothing more he could do here. As they had suggested, they all had to learn to revere Bapu in spite of what he had done to them or rather what had been done to them on a personal level.

Dada concealed his anguish from Magha, Antoine and Rosa. He didn't want to ruin the joyful mood they were all in. The two girls were in a mood of adorable excitement. Magha had bought some beautiful crockery, a sari for herself, a shirt for Dada and a dress and baby layette for Rosa by way of a baby shower. After their shopping was done they had had tea in a restaurant, a venture Magha could not undertake in Goa. Dada couldn't help noting the sad streak in her lovely brown eyes as she showed him the layette. She hadn't been able to have a child. She was crazy for one even though she had never confided this to him, he could tell. She frequently brought over young kids, even toddlers and tiny babies, from the neighbourhood and played with them, fed them, even bought dresses and shoes for them. He

suspected that she had offered special pujas and had sought the gods' help to cure her infertility. It was possible that she had booked the services of a tantrika too for the purpose. She did not want to confide in him for he was a known and confirmed atheist. He was almost convinced that the fault lay in him, not in her. He hadn't had a child by Vainibai. Bappa and Jagu too were childless. Kashba's branch was being terminated. There were whispers that their lack of faith in gods and rebellion against established social patterns had brought on them this peril. But Dada didn't believe in this either. Anyway medically or socially or religiously, he just wasn't in any position to rectify the matter. After dinner the girls got into a discussion about some sightseeing the next day. Dada and Antoine were left to themselves in the privacy of the sitting room.

"Have you had bad news about Bapu, Doctor? You don't look very happy to me," Antoine remarked. Younger though he was he had an accurate insight into Dada's glum mood.

"Well, the usual. I don't know if Bapu has to learn to live with it."

"It is a very tricky situation. Bala has to learn to live with it."

"Yes. I can see that. When I get back home I would prepare her for lifelong loneliness."

"Is the thought of this task making you dismal?"

"I suppose so. There is something else too. Can I adopt a child? Your Church has orphanages. Would they consider giving me one? More than me Magha is desperate for one. I have my patients. She has nothing. Sometimes I fear that she would crumble and get into depression." Dada too had more than his share of devastated moments and he confided them to Antoine now.

"I don't think so. Still I will ask the father here. But I should deem it difficult. The Church adopts abandoned children and raises them or gives them away for adoption. But they are raised as Catholic kids. The Church wouldn't give then to a Hindu family."

"That is true. I hadn't thought of this. Is there a Hindu orphanage in Mumbai?"

"Not yet. But there is talk of starting one. They should, you know. It is necessary. Why don't you start one in Goa?"

"Bapu is the only one with a flame, Antoine! Not me! I can do just this much and no more. As the solicitor told me we are but ordinary people. Could I not adopt a baby and raise it as a Catholic?"

"That would be difficult. Whether the father agrees or not you

yourself would run into difficulties. Why don't you convert yourself to Catholicism? Didn't the Hindus ostracize you? Hasn't Bapu converted himself to Buddhism? You are an avant-garde, the philosophy of the Catholic Church would definitely appeal to you."

"No, no I can't do that."

"Do not fear the wrath of people. Many educated Hindus are doing it, without coercion, because they feel that Christianity is a better religion. Even Brahmins are converting themselves."

"I know. But I myself can't walk out on Hinduism even though it has certain flaws."

"Anyway just keep the thought in your mind." Antoine gave him a few books about Catholicism. He already had a Bible. "Alternately if you hear of a scandal do not hesitate to ask to adopt that baby."

Dada nodded glumly. Back home he did make very discreet inquiries about a baby for adoption. But didn't get anywhere. His best bait was to adopt a baby of one of his relatives, people advised him.

"Laxmi has three sons. They are frequently here. Manik is permanently here. They are like your kids," Bala commented when he confided the matter to her. He could see that she was filled with malaise.

"Like my kids! Not my kids. And anyway these would never be entrusted to Magha as a mother, Dada reflected with enhanced glumness. Finally one Kathkari baby just came to live with them and eventually they adopted her.

Bapu was on way to Buddhagaya on recommendation from Dharmapal. He had spent three months at Kushinara beginning from the 25th of January 1904. But the ideal peace that he had been expecting there had proved to be elusive. Mahavir's rest house was very good. But throngs of villagers visited it; it was more renowned than the relics of Buddhist temple nearby. A copy of Raja Raviwarma's famous painting *Vishwamitra-Menaka* hung outside Bapu's room and the visitors split their sides roaring with laughter as soon as they set their eyes on it. Disturbed, Bapu had left the rest house and lived under a tree by the decrepit temple in the wilderness abounding in predators of all kinds. Here he learnt not to fear an attack from them. In fact he used their presence to experience the emotion of terror as described by the Buddha in the *Bhaya-Bhairava-Sukta*.

"Monks! On days of Chaturdashi, the No Moon Day, Full Moon Day and Ashtami I made it a point to visit and stay at places notorious

for dangers from ghosts and goblins. At night when a peacock caused a dried twig to fall off a tree, a forest animal stalked close to me or the leaves of trees fluttered violently I experienced fear. At that time if I happened to be wandering around I quelled that fear while wandering only. If I happened to be standing I quelled that fear while standing only. If the fear buffeted me while I was seated I destroyed it while remaining seated and if I got petrified while in bed I quashed it then and there." Part of the *Bhaya-Bharava-Sukta* quoted in *Nivedan*, chapter fourteen.

Often Bapu visited the crematorium, picked up a few bones and skulls and practised meditation by focusing his mind on them.

In the April of 1904, Dharmapal returned to Banaras after completing his tour of America, Japan, etc. It was his intention to start a technical school there. He had picked up a taste for industrial progress during his visit to these countries. He wrote to Bapu to come and see him. So at the end of the month Bapu made it to Banaras. The hostel was still not ready. But he happily settled under a Banyan tree nearby. However Dharmapal took him with him to his bungalow in the cantonment area. Then suggested that he visit Buddhagaya. A manager named Upasaka had been appointed there by Dharmapal. He looked after Bapu using money that Dharmapal sent regularly every month.

"The Buddha had spent six years at Buddhagaya practising penance in search of enlightenment in the company of five ascetics. He lived on lentil gruel, fasted and voluntarily undertook various other hardships, Enlightenment via the mortification of the body had been a frequently advised way for gaining spiritual experience in those days. But after a follow-up of six years the Buddha just lost faith in it. He stopped thrusting pain on his body and began to lead a regular but simple life. His companions were infuriated by his change of heart. They had considered him to be a trailblazer. Now they felt that he had cheated on them. They walked out on him and chose to live at Banaras. The Buddha continued to ruminate on metaphysical issues. He was known at the time as a Bodhisattva, a person who was in search of Bodhi, spiritual enlightenment. On the Full Moon day in the month of Vaishakh he partook a little *Kheer* given to him by Sujata, a Kshatriya girl and settled under a Banyan tree behind the temple at Buddhagaya. That same night he became enlightened and came to be known as the Buddha, the Enlightened. The place became very famous after the spread of Buddhism. Many kings and rich patrons dotted the city with *Stupas* and *Ashramas*. But now there is nothing but decrepit foundation half

buried in earth. The temple remains intact. Myth records that Mahanama, a king of Sri Lanka, had built a beautiful *Vihara* here which had walls of gold encrusted with pearls and rubies. But now there is nothing but a heap of rubble." *Nivedan* chapter fourteen.

At the time Bapu visited the city it had embroiled in a controversy that had received nationwide publicity.

"The main temple too was teetering on the brink of a similar fate. It was overgrown with trees like the Banyan. A part of the roof had collapsed. The yard around it was sinking; the temple was about to vaporise in the ground too. But in the winter of 1876 King Mindon Ming of Burma sent a delegation of three Burmese officers to Buddhagaya to undertake repairs of the temple. After consultations with the Mahantas, the Hindu Chiefs of temples there, the delegations undertook the necessary repairs. But the British Government objected. They feared that the Burmese king would spend a lot of money and effect some radical changes in the temple. This led to exhaustive correspondence between the two governments. Finally it was decided that the repair work should be carried on by the British Government without damaging the original artwork. But the expenses should be footed by the Burmese king.

According to this understanding the temple got repaired under the supervision of an English engineer. On the occasion of the inauguration of the renovated temple the British Government collected exhaustive information about this temple and published it in a book form. They also appointed a custodian to look after the Buddha's idol in there and other ancient valuables.

King Mindon Ming built a small rest house and lodged two or three monks there on his behalf. He also donated numerous gem-studded gold utensils made in Burma for the Puja of the Buddha. The land under the temple was controlled by the local priests. Still there was never any conflict between these and the Burmese monks. In the January of 1886 the British Government ousted king Thibaw of Burma and annexed Burma to their Indian colony. The monks at Buddhagaya lost their precious patronage and were forced to get back home. The gem-studded gold utensils were taken over by the local priests. They still have them. They also began to establish their authority over the temple....

In 1893 Dharmapal attended the conference at Chicago, as secretary of the Mahabodhi Sabha. After this he came to enjoy considerable clout amidst the Europeans and the Indians too. On his way back from America he visited Japan and brought with him a

beautiful idol of the Buddha. He desired to enshrine this idol on the first floor of the Buddhagaya temple. But Mahanta, the local priest, wouldn't hear of such a move. As a result the idol just collected dust at Gaya for a year or so. Finally Dharmapal took it to Buddhagaya and placed it on the first floor at daybreak one day. He took two monks with him and began to offer *Puja* to this idol.

As soon as the Mahanta was put abreast of this development he sent an army of his disciples to counter the move. They flung the idol outdoors. This stimulated riots not only in Buddhagaya but also in Gaya. Mr. Macpherson, Magistrate at Gaya despatched police for the protection of the idol and Dharmapal, both.

The turbulence led some of Dharmapal's friends to advise him to file a law suit against the Mahanta. But thinkers like Shrisumangalacharya, the Chairman of the Mahabodhi Sabha were opposed to taking such drastic a step. Still they sent a barrister from Sri Lanka to Gaya. He too opined that a court case should be avoided. However, Dharmapal filed a case, goaded on by the support of his Indian and English friends.

The Mahanta was an exceedingly wealthy man. He engaged Barrister Manmohan Ghosh to represent him and got him over from Calcutta specially for this matter. Still Mr. Macpherson gave a verdict in favour of the Buddhists and held that they did have certain right on the place. He doled out punishment to four disciples of the Mahanta.

The Mahanta appealed to the Court of the District Judge. Therein some punishments got confirmed and a few got revised to some extent. From here Manmohan Ghosh took this matter to the High Court at Calcutta. He launched an acerbic drive in the local and foreign English newspapers. His perspective was that the verdict given by the magistrate at Buddhagaya and the judge at Calcutta was intended to exterminate the Hindu religion. At that time bizarre beliefs were being bandied about regarding Buddhism. Hence in no time at all Dharmapal became the target of unconcealed public despise.

Finally the High Court Suit was heard before Justice Banerji and the Chief Justice. Their unanimous judgement was that the Buddhist had an inviolable right of offering *Puja* etc. in the temple at Buddhagaya. But ruled that the Buddhists had no prerogative to place a new idol there without the sanction of the Mahanta. In other words they turned around the judgement of the lower court. They even released the Mahanta's disciples.

Dharmapal incurred a prohibitive expenditure for this court

matter. He lost a fund of thirty to forty thousand of rupees collected by the Mahabodhi Sabha. Because of this he lost the prestige that he enjoyed in Sri Lanka and other countries and found it nearly impossible to collect money to conduct the activities of the Mahabodhi Sabha. The Burmese however never lost their faith in him. Even after the scandal of his having blown up the money erupted they continued to render considerable help to him.

The unpleasant episode turned the Mahanta into Dharmapala's sworn enemy. Earlier he had promised to give Dharmapal some land for a rest house. Even a deed of sale had been signed. But as soon as whispers that Dharmapal was at cross continued to aggravate and ended in the above-mentioned court suit the deed got cancelled.

Delving into history one finds that neither party was at fault. The temple was unquestionably a Buddhist temple. All the same the land belonged to the complex of the Hindu temple, that is to say to the Hindus. It was just one of those things, a feud with deep roots in ancient history. After the rout of Buddhism in India the region around Buddhagaya had got turned into wilderness, most of the monuments reduced to rubble. In the times the Emperor Jahangir, a Punjabi sanyasi of the Shaiva cult built a hut by the river and settled here. He soon came to have a small entourage of disciples. In a few years' time Emperor Shahjahan gave him the grant of two villages near the temple. Over the years a large complex was built by the temple and the chiefs called Mahantas. The Mahanta built a large monastery for himself and his disciples by making use of the bricks and stones of the decrepit monuments. King Ashoka had erected a fence of sculpted pillars round the temple. The Mahanta utilized most of these for the construction of his monastery and its compound. Later on Lord Curzon passed a law protecting ancient monuments and other things, and forced the Mahanta to place Ashoka's pillars in their original positions. Even so a large number of idols of the Buddha and Bodhisattva have still been buried in the walls of the Mahanta's monastery.

When Dharmapala and the Mahanta began to spar with one another the situation here became incendiary. The Mahanta lives in the fear that the Buddhists would join hands with the Government and defuse his power source. His mind is continually assailed by suspicions about the ulterior motives of the Buddhists. The Government has no desire to intervene in this delicate matter and fling a burning match over this power keg. So it refuses to evolve a positive policy regarding this matter. The Mahanta has resorted to many other tactics to curb the

claim of the Buddhists over the temple; he has transformed an idol into the ninth Avatar of Vishnu by marking its brow with a very prominent Trishula-shaped *tilak*. He has even appointed a Brahmin to perform its *Puja* according to the ritual described in the Shrutis and Smritis, Hindu Scriptures." *Nivedan* chapter fourteen.

Bapu refused to be affected by the unpleasant politics and paid the Mahanta a formal visit. In spite of his paranoid feelings towards Buddhists the Mahanta received Bapu well. He even undertook to send Bapu his daily meal and offered him some money. But as usual Bapu refused to accept it. He suggested that it be utilized to start a school for the villagers' children. There was no school nearby. Most of the people were illiterate. The Mahanta agreed wholeheartedly. Bapu was happy. He was deeply impressed by the Mahanta's sound social ideas and by the discovery that the Mahanta was not holding his religion against him. However, he had underestimated the Mahanta's skilful moves. Thereafter the Mahanta chose to remain absolutely incommunicado. Discreet inquiries revealed that a school in his complex would be against his interest, therefore he would never sponsor it. He needed cheap labour to work in the land belonging to the complex. And the only way to get a constant supply was to keep the local populace in stultifying illiteracy and keep them from exposure to other choices.

Undaunted, Bapu decided to make a headway on his own. He asked Upasaka to save a small amount out of the money received from Dharmapal for their upkeep. He bought slates and primary books for the children and employed a private tutor at a monthly salary of five rupees. Now the Mahanta started open warfare. The tutor's brother had been employed by the Mahanta as a clerk. He threatened the fellow with expulsion for his entire family. The next day the tutor vanished. Bapu's rudimentary school had to be folded up. It had the life time of less than a week.

The episode should have taught Bapu the omnipresent nature of the power game. He should have learnt the universal truth that for personalities embroiled in politics of any sort everything was a move in the game, even the most innocuous of humanitarian projects, and that if he didn't want to be a pawn in such a game he should not seek to develop such projects. But he didn't learn anything. His premise was that good principles would always transcend politics, that projects would be made or marred by the strength of the principles they were based on and nothing else. He plainly underestimated the power game. A shortcoming that he would have to pay for with trauma in the future.

The deep faith he had come to have in sound principles and their efficacy blinded him to a reality which was not necessarily supportive to moral rectitude. He would continue to plunge wholeheartedly into a variety of social projects, get bitterly disappointed when things wouldn't go the way he thought they should and walk off in dejection to a cave or a *vihara*.

This had been Bapu's first encounter with the moves in a power game. His disillusion bordered on utter devastation. Slowly, with the help of the *Tipitaka* and meditation by the bank of the river Nairanjara he wrenched himself out of it. As soon as the rainy season was over he was out of Buddhagaya. On way he visited Rajagriha, the capital of Magadha in the times of the Buddha. After the death of the Buddha Sthavira Mahakashyapa had organized a conference here. Soon after this the Nanda kings moved their capital to Pataliputra turning Rajagriha into barren land. But the participating monks had dispersed and visited foreign countries keeping their religion alive there.

From there Bapu went back to Kushinara. Here he improvised a small hut with old garments under the very same tree where he had spent three months earlier. He had planned to spend a year here. However, he met a young Burmese monk there named Chandramuni who was well versed in Sanskrit and Hindi due to Khejari's generosity. He had been selected to handle the management of the rest house after Mahavira retired. He spoke very highly of Sagai, a mountain near Mandalay profusely dotted by caves abounding in monks who practised meditation. Bapu, always eager to visit new countries, was immediately possessed of a strong wish to go there. But before he left for Burma again he visited a few more sacred places.

He boarded a train for Balarampur. Then walked to Shrawasti known as Sahyat Mahyat. No signs or memories of the city's ancient grandeur remained except for a heap of rubble which had been the site of the *Arama* of Anathapindika. Here Bapu could identify the Achirawati river mentioned in Buddhist literature. Considerable excavation had been done here. But the statues, the pottery and other stuff had been taken else where for want of a local museum.

Bapu's next destination was Kapilavastu and Lumbindevi, the Buddha's birthplaces, now in Nepal. He travelled to Soharatganj and contacted a local zamindar named Soharatsing. Soharatsing was very helpful and kindhearted. He had helped many Buddhist pilgrims travel to Buddha's birthplace. He assigned a barber as guide for Bapu and this helped tremendously.

Kapilavastu was at a distance of seven miles from Soharatganj. This too was barren land now thickly overgrown with teaks. Bapu was pleasantly surprised to find another important spot nearby at Nigliva, ancient Nigali. Ashoka had erected an obelisk here in memory of the Konagaman Buddha. The obelisk was still there but had toppled down to the ground and was broken.

Lumbindevi was fourteen miles away from Nigliva. The city of Lumbindevi was two miles away from Buddha's birthplace referred to as the Lumbini forest in Buddhist literature. This too had been reduced to heaps of decrepit monuments and overgrowth. But the archeological department had excavated an obelisk, erected by Ashoka, from amidst the debris. It had lost its top. But a ten feet high piece had been reinstalled. It bears an inscription saying that Ashoka visited the place for it was the birthplace of the Buddha, offered a *Puja* and built the obelisk. When it sailed into Bapu's vision he was so overcome he rushed forward and flopped by the side of the obelisk, tears coursing down his flat cheeks.

However, the usual disillusionment was soon to follow. A small temple had been built in honour of Mayadevi, the Buddha's mother. The idol had been ravaged by the passage of time. But the background clearly depicted the scene of the Buddha's birth. Nevertheless people retained no memory of the Buddha's teachings. Animal sacrifices were rampant. The steps and verandahs of the temple were splattered with blood. The sight filled Bapu with familiar disgust. But by this time he had learnt to reign in the bout. He derived satisfaction from the knowledge that he had completed the pilgrimage of the four important Buddhist places along with a few others. Lumbindevi which was the Buddha's birthplace, Buddhagaya, where He has received divine enlightenment, Sarnath where He had delivered his first sermon and Kushinara the place of His *Mahaparinirvana*.

He was replete; he had read all the scriptures and visited all the places of pilgrimage.

TWELVE 1904 to 1906

Mahavir bought Bapu a train ticket to Calcutta, Khejari, the kind patron of all Buddhists, gladly arranged for the money for Bapu's boat fare from Calcutta to Burma. At Rangoon he met his old friend Dnyanatriloaka who had still been groping for spiritual training and peace, and groping unsuccessfully. He too was toying with the idea of going to Mandalay and spending a few days in the Sagai mountains. They moved to Mandalay and settled down at the Vihara of U Rajendra [U is a title denoting respect, placed before the names of monks or famous people]. Sagai and Mandalay were specially popular amidst the monks for the privacy they enjoyed in the cluster of small huts and caves dug up in the side of the Sagai mountains. The people of Mandalay and Sagai were specially kind to the monks and made it a point to send them food every morning. Amidst such ideal conditions of solitude and spirituality a few *Ashrams* for Buddhist nuns too had been built. Their adherence to the ten rules of ideal conduct laid down by the Buddha was laudably strict. [These rules are called the ten *Paramitas*, controlling points that provide the framework for the nuns' conduct. They are: charity, morality, renunciation, wisdom, effort, patience, truth, universal love and equanimity]. At a time 250 to 300 nuns could be accommodated in an *Ashram*. This spoke for the clout of the religion in Burma. Bapu was tremendously happy about it. The realization turned out to be embalming for the ravages that his mind had suffered from contrary experiences in India.

The chief nun of this particular *Ashram* was from a famous family in Burma. She had a perfect mastery over the *Tripitakas*, especially the *Abhidharmapitaka* (the basket of rules of religion). She knew by heart some of the last chapters from this book. The monks rarely had the courage to discuss Buddhist philosophy with her. Even though the Buddha had taught equality, the monks did not want to be defeated by a mere woman.

Bapu soon came to know that Master Uttara who lived nearby was an excellent tutor for meditation. He and Dnyanatriloaka lost no time in contacting him. At first Uttaracharya asked them to visualize the word "Araham" [the Buddha] in the Burmese script and meditate

over it.

The duo began to meditate in separate place. There was a high mountain behind their *Vihara* and a small decrepit cave at its top. Bapu used to go there and spend the day meditating. He had always been passionately fond of natural beauty. The breathtaking view of the basin of the Irawady river flowing by the base of the mountain helped his meditation. Right from day one he could concentrate on the word "Araham" without the least distraction and stay in sustained meditation for a long time. Dnyanatriloaka had chosen another isolated place. But he couldn't concentrate on anything. He could envisage the first letter a. But as soon as he extended his imagination to the second letter R it disintegrated into a jumble of lines and those in turn got metamorphosed into wriggling snakes.

Day by day his plight worsened, he could evoke nothing beautiful nor could he sustain the visual for long. This disheartened him endlessly. He had come from a very comfortable Western background. Hence getting used to all the hardships of monkhood was an uphill task for him. He frequently got traumatized by innocuous remarks or jests. They shared a windowless cave which had two minuscule sections barely adequate to contain two cots. Gyantriloka had opted to sleep in the inner section probably because he feared attacks from predators like tigers. Once, before retiring for the night Bapu casually quipped:

"Suppose the cave door collapses and we get buried here what will happen to us? We will have to remain buried in this dark hole till rescue turns up, if at all. You are in a more vulnerable position for your room is in the belly of the mountain."

There! That was the end of whatever mental peace Dnyanatriloaka was enjoying. He swore he was through with a cavedweller's life style and would continue to live there only if they exchanged places. Bapu complied immediately. All the same he couldn't take it any more and left a few days later for Rangoon. Though his ardour for attaining a high degree of spirituality was very genuine he just couldn't bear the pressures of an unfamiliar environment. Bapu, however, decided to stick it out. He had arrived at Sagai in December 1904. Dnyanatriloaka went back in the March of 1905. With the advent of summer finding food became even more stressful. The nuns who had given them food departed elsewhere. Apparently the nuns as well most of the monks took up residence here only for the winter. Also the region which Bapu had hailed as a haven became unbearably hot now, the rocks sweltering like red hot cinders. Water too became scarce. Except for one or two

all the monks in the *Vihara* moved out. Those who chose to stay back had to trudge three miles to downtown Sagai for their alms. Even after doing this the supply of the meal was not always assured. This was an unforeseen hardship. Bapu could take it no more. He was not even upto undertaking the daily trek.

There was another *Vihara* nearby, one administrated by Master Pandava. His large entourage had continued to live there in summer too. Bapu decided to put in a request for a hut there. But here too he ran into unexpected problems. Pandava was known to be a master of Pali. However, he couldn't understand Bapu's pronunciation. But hated to admit this. He flew into a towering rage shrieking that Bapu's pronunciations were awful and that he shouldn't pronounce Pali the Sanskrit way, but the Burmese way. Bapu contended that his pronunciations were based on the Sinhalese ones which were supposed to be the most accurate and that the Buddha had preached that at all times one should lay stress on the meaning of the word and not on its pronunciation. However, Pandava was in no frame of mind to acquiesce. Bapu's argument simply enhanced his fury.

"The Indians and the Simhalis are getting distanced from Buddhism due to such pronunciations. Islam and Christianity are enjoying a speedy patronage in India. In Ceylon too Christianity is taking roots with uncanny speed," he snapped, advancing totally untenable arguments. Bapu could see that there was no point in trying to effect a change of heart in him. His ego was hurt, he had been offended and he was not going to listen to reason. Bapu put in a casual request for a hut. Pandava answered noncommittally that he would think over it and let him know the next day. But the next day he sent word that a hut was not available.

Undaunted, Bapu reconnoitered and found a *Vihara* built on the top of a hillock nearby. A middle aged monk who was in charge agreed to have him there. For his meal he still would have to go to a nun's *Ashram* by the riverbank or visit the town which was further away. Bapu stuck it out for a couple of weeks. But could not take it any more. His health deteriorated. Even finding potable water beset problems for him. Throughout summer the monks drank rain water stored in a large tank. Bapu had unfailingly fetched water from the river. But soon he became bedridden with high temperature and could not do it any more. He drank the tank water after boiling and straining it. But still found it unpalatable. He quickly reached the tether end of his fortitude. As soon as he got back a little strength to make it back to Mandalay he did.

At Mandalay Bapu was lucky to find a good *vihara*, that of Master U Triloka. Bapu was immensely relieved to find that the Master spoke pure Pali and with the same pronunciations as Bapu's. Master Triloka was wellknown for strict adherence to Buddhist commandments. If a monk got up late he criticized him saying:

"Small girls in Mandalay are getting up before day break to cook food for you. You live on that food and spend your time sleeping? You should be ashamed!"

He had specified a punishment for late risers watering the trees in the *Vihara* and filling with water a certain number of pitchers placed before the idol of the Buddha. One day Bapu noticed that the Master himself was performing this chore.

"Master! How come you yourself have undertaken to perform this punitive act?" Bapu asked incredulously.

"That is because I got up late today," was the answer.

"But you have made this rule for your disciples. It couldn't be applied to you!" Bapu exclaimed.

"We should never take the freedom of breaking the law that we have made ourselves. We can achieve something only if we respect a good law and show obeisance to it. We have to realise that the law is superior to us all and hold it up wholeheartedly."

Another day Bapu sighted Master Triloka straggling through the muddy roads of Mandalay begging alms. He was stunned. Triloka was a sectarian and a wellknown personality. Surely he did not have to wander about in rain and mud seeking food? Once again Bapu questioned the point of undertaking such hardship.

"If I don't go it would not be possible to find vegetables, dal, etc., in sufficient quantities for all the monks. No one in the city is acquainted with the young monks. So they do not get proper food. People give them only rice and bid them adieu. Hence even if it rains cats and dogs or even if the roads are covered with thick slush I make it a point to go for alms. How can I bear to eat good food while the young monks are obliged to eat plain rice?" Triloka explained, not the faintest trace of boastfulness or false pride in his tone. He was not only great, he was also good.

Bapu and Master Triloka got on like a house afire. They adored and respected each other. Triloka imposed no constricting rules on Bapu for he was a guest. He even went out of the way and requested some people to give Bapu Indian vegetarian meals. This helped. Due to Triloka's instructions Bapu could find a good meal only after begging

in ten houses. Still after a while the food began to afflict Bapu's health. Nor could he endure the scorching May heat at Mandalay. He decided to move on to Molmin.

A society had been founded in Mandalay at the time to boost the spread of Buddhism. It undertook projects to help monks organize lectures and publish books on Buddhism in the Burmese language. This society bought Bapu's ticket there. The *Viharas* at Mandalay and those at Molmin offered an antithetical contrast. Those at Molmin, built by wealthy merchants, were palatial. The walls of some of these were gilded and encrusted with precious stone. However, the standard of the monks there was poor in comparison with the scholarly monks at Mandalay. Barely four or five monks lived at one *vihara*. Alms were galore. During the rainy season they were piled with a myriad gifts and needed to engage servants to carry them home.

Bapu lived in the *Vaijayanta Vihara* of master U Sagar. He was happier here than at Mandalay, living in a small room by the *Stupa*. But here too it was impossible to find vegetarian food. He had to live on boiled lentils and rice and tinned butter. After the four months of rainfall were over a Master named Pradnyasvami invited him over to his *Vihara*. This stay was more meaningful. Bapu taught Pradnyasvami the *Mugdhabodh* grammar and the former in turn taught him the *Abhidharmarthasangraha*. However, Bapu's health continued to deteriorate. Depression set in. He even toyed with the idea of committing suicide. But somehow he got over the impulse.

He tried living in two more *Viharas*. He moved to the Biluchaun island which was on the other side of Molmin, thence to a cluster of beautiful wooden huts five or six miles away. There were some nice springs of water there and also a forest abounding in tigers. These did not bother him. But the problems about food remained unsolved. Bapu could see that he had got himself into a no-win situation. As a monk he was forbidden to cook his food. All the same he couldn't keep his body and soul together on what he got by begging. Most of the food was nonvegetarian and he had to throw it away. He decided to go back to India. But the Masters contended that he would be breaking yet one more rule of monkhood if he went there. There were no monks in India and one single monk would not be able to live there within the framework of the Commandments. A monk was supposed to live in a *Sangha* all the time. They were right. With boundless exasperation Bapu now opted to renounce his monkhood. The Masters were not quite happy about this decision. All the same they could see that is was

inevitable. With a heavy heart they gave their consent setting but one condition: the ceremony for the renunciation of his monkhood should be performed in India, not here in their presence. In January of 1906 Bapu was back in Calcutta. In spite of the physical torments that he had experienced in Burma the two years that he had spent there were extremely rewarding. His powers of concentration had got enhanced and he had procured immaculate mastery over the Pali treatises, even the difficult ones like the *Abhidhammapitaka*. In his leisure hours he had devoured a plethora of Pali books. The first one or two parts of the *Visuddhimagga* that he had been inordinately fond of reading over and over again like light fiction would prove to be of immense use in the near future.

Now that Bapu had resolved to return to his country and to the status of a householder he began to be assailed by thoughts of making his knowledge and experiences useful to others. The terrible unrest that had gnawed at his mind ever since he was twelve or even younger vanished. His self-esteem was back. He was possessed by a new tranquility which struck a happy balance between his hunger for scholarship and spirituality and duties. He wanted to reinvent his life.

"The period between my departure from Goa to my arrival at Calcutta from Burma in the January of 1906 has to be categorized as my strife for education. My only goal during this period was how to seek knowledge about Buddhism. But now the desire to spread this knowledge of Buddhism to the best of my ability began to grip my mind. Nevertheless I couldn't evolve a pertinent plan of action which would utilise my accomplishments for India's benefit," *Nivedan*, chapter sixteen.

Service to the country had always been his second target and now that the first goal had been achieved he was ready to work for the next one. Even though branded as lacking in common sense, Bapu had never been one to go in for self-deception. Teaching or sermonizing from the pulpit of a Buddhist institution were the most obvious choices. But he was very accurately aware of the practical impediments he would have to face while pursuing this new goal; he didn't have a degree nor a post in a Buddhist institute. He was toying with the idea of going to Amraoti or Pune where he had a fine and helpful friend circle when one of those coincidences that had characterized his life earlier, stepped in and propelled him to an unvisualized destiny.

On reaching Calcutta he found that the Mahabodhi Sabha had been shifted to smaller premises. So he had to stay at the Buddhankura

Vihara situated in Kapali Tola, a not-so-clean part of Calcutta. He had arrived on a Sunday and decided to leave on Tuesday. On Monday he had a visitor, Harinath Dey, a personable man in his early thirties, dressed modishly in a suit and tie. He introduced himself as a professor of English and a member of the senate.

"I am keenly interested in popularizing Pali, I have some urgent work with you and would love to have a leisurely talk with you. However today I am very busy with my brother's wedding. If you could kindly postpone your departure I would be very thankful," Dey implored. It was all very mystifying. Bapu couldn't make head or tail of his beseechment. However, since he didn't have anything urgent on his hands he acquiesced.

Harinath Dey was the eldest son of Bhutnath Dey, a selfmade Bengali of the Kayastha caste who had been a practising lawyer at Raipur. In his early childhood Harinath was found to be dimwitted (like Bapu?) So his father had completely ignored his education. Nevertheless the boy was inordinately interested in learning something, anything. From his mother he learnt the Bengali alphabet and began to read Bengali books. His mother knew a little bit of Hindi. He picked up that too. Then he approached a missionary and started to study English. After he was eight years old his father thought of sending him to school, then discovered that the child had mastered three languages! The father began to make special efforts now to attend to the boy's education. He hired private tutors for him and coached him personally too. Harinath's natural talent effloresced under such care. He made astounding progress in many subjects. By the time he was twelve he became very fluent in English. At thirteen or fourteen he had cleared the matriculation examination with flying colours and earned a scholarship too. Bhutnath Dey sent him to the Xavier College. He scored brilliant results in all the examination of the University and was particularly known for his mastery over languages. After he secured his M.A. degree he received a scholarship from the Government of India. He went to England. At first he tried to clear the Indian Civil Service examination. But his performance in mathematics and law was not up to the mark. Hence he failed. But didn't lose courage. He appeared for the B.A. examination of the Cambridge University. At the University of Calcutta he had stood first in Greek, Latin and English. In addition he had mastered French, German and Arabic. He was a born polyglot and could master any language in no time. He was reported to have learnt by heart the English-Arabic dictionary. He had a wonderful style for English prose and composed poems too. After clearing B.A. at

Cambridge he found a job in the Indian Educational Service. His first appointment was as professor of English at the Dacca University. But was recently transferred to the Presidency College, Calcutta. He lived in a rented house in Dharamtola. His unremitting hunger for learning new languages had driven him to do M.A. in Pali at the Calcutta University. But he was unable to find a teacher for the difficult texts prescribed for the course. A monk named Purna who had known Bapu since his Colombo days and had kept in close touch with his achievements, lived in a house near the Buddhankura Vihara. Harinath Dey had frequently approached him to find for him somebody who would explain these texts to him. Bapu was the right answer and Purna had not lost any time in reporting this to Dey. Hence Dey's sudden visit to Bapu and the intriguing entreaty.

Dey turned up at the *Vihara* the next morning as promised. He pressed Bapu to stay at Calcutta at least for three months and teach him *Atthasalini*, a Pali commentary on the *Sutta-Naipat* (which Bapu would edit later on). Apparently Dey had corresponded even with some scholars in Germany and other countries. But failed to find anybody who could read these difficult books.

"So kindly explain this book to me in two months and then go wherever. I am willing to give you anything," he said bluntly, yet imploringly.

"Find me a place which is reasonably free of noise and bustle," was the only condition Bapu laid down. Dey had no hesitation agreeing. He lodged Bapu in the outhouse of his father-in-law's house which was close to his. For the meals he had Bapu over at his place. Bapu had not yet relinquished monkhood. So he observed all its rules and regulations, living on one meal per day.

By the 15th of March, 1906, the *Atthasalini* was thoroughly elucidated to Dey by Bapu. The text of this book had been published by the Pali Text Society and contained many typographical errors which Bapu brought to Dey's notice. This elevated Dey's respect for him as also his exultance for having found him. He began to press Bapu to settle permanently at Calcutta.

Bapu had enjoyed his stay in the city, for through Dey he had met a whole group of elites, people who were vibrant with ideas and ceaselessly pursued new horizons. After so many years spent as a cavedweller he simply enjoyed the company of these men pulsating with progressive ideas. He had become very friendly with Manmohan Ghosh also professor of English at the Presidency College. He was the grandson of the daughter of the wellknown Bengali reformer Rajnarain

Basu. His father was in the Indian Medical service. His elder brother was secretary to the Prince of Kuchbihar and Arvind Ghosh, the younger brother, was on a high post in the state of Baroda. Later on he rose to become the principal of the National College. The youngest brother Barindra Ghosh had been one of the accused in the bomb plot of Manik Tola and was serving life sentence at Andaman, the notorious Kala Pani. Manmohan Ghosh had acquired a perfect mastery over English. His poems had been applauded even in England. The year they met, 1906, Ghosh was going through terrible trauma. His wife had dementia and was slowly dying. Since he was of a sensitive poetic nature he had no fortitude to go through this excruciating period. He discovered that he could get over his abject despondency at least temporarily if he had a talk with Bapu. This is how their friendship was initiated. Bapu had given him some Buddhist books which put sorrow in a far broader perspective interpreting it as an unshakable part of life and infusing strength to cope with it. Ghosh was swept off his feet by this new philosophy and since then had taken to discussing the gospels of Buddhism with Bapu.

However, these friends were in no way adequate to fill up Bapu's life. He was still very far off from a new goal. This was upsetting and kind of made him feel hollow and aimless. As a ploy to fill up his time meaningfully he came up with the idea of visiting Sikkim which was close by and a Buddhist country. He longed to note the nature of Buddhism there. Luckily for him Dey had many contacts among the V.I.P.s in Sikkim too. Tashilama, the high priest of Buddhism in Sikkim had visited Calcutta in the December of 1905. At that time he had been felicitated by the Buddhankura Sabha and Harinath Dey had taken the initiative for this function. Dey procured for Bapu a letter from the Buddhankura Sabha addressed to the Prince of Sikkim and he wrote one himself to Mr. White, the British resident there. Manmohan Ghosh had already written to the principal of the Government school at Darjeeling and arranged for his stay with him. Dey took care of all the expenses, tickets, clothing etc. Bapu needed to keep money with him for this trip. So finally he renounced his monkhood.

He left Calcutta for Darjeeling around the 20th of March, 1906, once again trekking through mountainous terrain. The principal of the local school Ghosh had given a letter to, sent his gardener as guide. This helped. Bapu was at the palace without any mishaps. The prince received him very well. He ordered his staff to keep his prestigious guest in a room in the palace only.

Bapu tried to pick up Tibetan. But couldn't progress beyond a knowledge of the script. Mr. White had already informed him that no one in Sikkim thought of Buddhism as a great and glorious religion and had predicted that Bapu would soon get fed up with the religious conditions reigning there. His prediction was soon proven to be accurate. Cows were slaughtered in the monasteries of Sikkim and monks fed on beef despite an official ban.

In the meantime Dey had left for England in the company of the prince of Varadwan. He wrote Bapu a letter from Aden pressing him to come back to Calcutta. But Bapu remained unpersuaded. The only future he had at Calcutta was to give tuition to Dey and this didn't seem a worthwhile or permanent goal to him. His lassitude continued to augment and he just couldn't extricate himself from Sikkim even though his stay there was uncomfortable and meaningless. But he began to be swayed by a letter written by Ghosh, who had a broader perspective.

"You do not want to be known as a rolling stone. You have been one so far for your search of the Buddha's tenets. Now you have to stay in one place. Take roots and become a tree. Right now Calcutta is in the throes of an unprecedented hunger for education. You could take advantage of this and add a new meaningful dimension to your secluded life by spreading the knowledge of Buddhism. Nothing much could be achieved by staying at Sikkim."

Ghosh's letter made a greater impact on Bapu's mind for he knew Ghosh to be a fine man who had nothing but his interests in his mind. About Dey he was not quite so sure. He had instinctively judged him as a go-getter and selfcentred man. He too was insisting on having Bapu at Calcutta and would leave no stone unturned to keep him there. However, he would not give priority to Bapu's life; he would definitely have some ulterior purpose, that of feathering his own nest and utilizing Bapu's knowledge for that. Bapu even feared that Dey might even jettison him after he had milked all the possible advantages from his company and was done with him. Thus it was Ghosh's letter which finally wrested him out of the stupor into which he had fallen.

Bapu's first thought was of the responsibilities that he had renounced six years back. Particularly the debt. He wrote a letter to Vishnu Naik, querying if it had been repaid. If it hadn't he would find some way to pay it back himself. Bapu considered that debt as his prime responsibility. Bala and Manik were, in all probability, the next in line. But so far he had not given them a concrete thought.

THIRTEEN

July – October 1906

Bapu was overjoyed to receive three letters at the prince's palace, Sikkim, in response to the one he had written to Vishnu Naik. One was from Naik himself, a postcard, wishing him well, congratulating him and informing him that the debt remained unpaid. A little bit banal though the letter was, it went a long way to wrest Bapu out of his cavedweller's mentality. The second one was from his brother. The third was an fat envelope from Dada. This had been the first to arrive for it had been mailed in Mumbai.

"Hi, Bapu!" Dada had written." It was wonderful to have your news from Vishnu Naik. I have longed to have your address for a long time in order to congratulate you on your achievements. I had visited Solicitor Dixit and Mr. Dabholkar and they had reported to me in glowing terms how you were a master of both Sanskrit and Pali..." He had then passed on details of Manik's education. He didn't know how much of Bala's angst to convey. He had just said that they had looked after her well and that she was in good health. The last part of the letter mentioned Dada's relationship with Magha:... "I was filled with unquenchable compassion for the girl. In fact I was in love and still am. Whether right or wrong I have taken her for a wife though without a formal religious ceremony. She has been accepted by my friends and relatives, even by orthodox ones like Naik. He heartily had tea in my house or rather Magha's house. Yet I always wonder how much of this acceptance springs from the fact that I am a useful person not to be antagonized and they are reluctant to displease me. I hope to have heartfelt support from you. You would agree that this custom of Devdasis is all wrong, yet one more vice practised under the garb of ancient religion..." When he started his letter Dada had only wanted to put Bapu abreast of the latest developments in the Laud family. But as he wrote he started opening up his heart to his old chum.

"I heartily approve that you have paved the way to an important social reform. Hopefully the message would be picked up by all the Goans. At the same time I cannot but express my distress over Vainibai's plight. The news about Magha would have given me greater pleasure had she been your only wife. I do hope that Vainibai is being well

looked after and loved (your word). I do not support polygamy." Bapu wrote to him.

Dada took the letter in the spirit in which it was written, the spirit of frank and good-intentioned camaraderie. He wrote back. But did not refer to the relationship again. Bapu had said what he wanted to say and that was that. He was aware of the injustice done to Vainibai. But was in no position to rectify it. He took a rowboat and showed the letter to Bala at Sankhwal. She had heartily settled there. Nobody ever referred to the trauma and tiffs Bapu had inadvertently shoved them in. Everybody behaved as if Bapu had just left last week for Calcutta and would turn up any time.

"Look who is talking! Didn't Kosambi do me an injustice?" Bala ejaculated when she had read the letter. "Anyway it is good to know that he disapproves polygamy," Bala quipped. Ever since she found out that Bapu was hale and hearty, she had become her former self, gregarious, ebullient and full of concern and warmth for everybody. Her belligerence was ancient history; but it had not been eradicated completely. It would erupt if ever she or her family was offended.

"He doesn't understand love."

"He understands and accepts responsibilities. I am happy for that much," Bala snapped. This was not what she had said to him a few minutes after she had given birth to Manik. But he didn't want to point it out to her and stimulate anguish. Now that Bapu was thinking of getting back to a conventional lifestyle Dada was not going to make an issue of ideas that were not in vogue, love, for instance.

"Write to him that Vainibai is out of her mind," Bala suggested. She resented to have Dada branded as an unjust man.

"Let him find it out when he comes here. I do not want to enter into a prolonged argument over the subject."

"That is right. He might get hurt and decide to stay away. Nothing is going to change anyway. You will stick to Magha and he will stick to his principles."

"When you are made to marry at fourteen things are not going to be any different."

"When Kosambi lands here together you two can take up all kinds of reforms," Bala laughed again.

"We should, actually. Now that he is a scholar and a great man people would listen to him and follow his advice," Dada remarked, joining her laughter.

"His dictates," Bala corrected him jestingly.

"I can't see him dictating to anybody. But maybe he has changed."

Bapu was in a fix. He couldn't get back home unless and until he had a means of livelihood. This had enforced a little change in him. His passivity in this regard had vanished and he was trying hard to find a job. He had returned to Calcutta towards the end of July. Dey was back too, Bapu had begun to teach him the *Theragatha*, another difficult book prescribed for M.A. This had made the complacent Dey very happy, but not Bapu. He was looking for better opportunities. He toyed with the idea of starting a Pali class. But soon gave it up as unviable. A private class for Pali just wouldn't have adequate number of students.

Some Bengali reformers had founded the National College. It was to be inaugurated on the 15th of August. If Pali was incorporated in the curriculum of this college Bapu would get a professor's post, Manmohan Ghosh had assured him. Ghosh arranged a meeting for Bapu with Satyendranath Tagore who along with Sir Gurunath Banerji and Dr. Rashbehari Ghosh, was one of the founders. Tagore got Pali included in the curriculum of the college in spite of shortness of time and Bapu got the job. However, the salary was very low thirty rupees per month. It was far from adequate to pay off the debt and care for Bala and Manik. Still Bapu welcomed it as meaningful activity he had been looking for. Buddhist philosophy taught a man to stay away from the hunger of money. Bapu had complied. For six years he had operated without money. He would get on divinely on this pittance of a salary, he kept telling himself.

By all rules of logic Dey should have been happy. But he wasn't. Probably because other patrons had found this job for Bapu and his monopoly over the latter was over. He was quick to register disapprobation, but came up with an entirely unexpected line of reasoning:

"The National College is antagonistic to the Government and I am a Government servant. So how can you and me get along now? If you wished to find a job I could have found one that was hundred times better than this one. But now that you are associated with this institution I wouldn't be able to do anything," he rasped.

Bapu figured that his disgruntlement sprang from the fact that he had not been consulted in the matter and that he had lost the monopoly right over Bapu's qualifications. But he remained unruffled.

"My main purpose is not employment. I don't want to be a

recluse any more I want to be with people. I want to get back to mainstream public life. I want to follow the normal path, the path of a householder's life and if possible, help my family. These are the reasons behind my acceptance of the job. People like Sir Gurudas Banerji and Dr. Rasbehari Ghosh, who are the favourites of the British Government, are managing the institution. Hence I do not discern any reason for the Government to suspect me of ulterior motives. Also no matter how incendiary the institution, it is hardly likely that anyone would want to spread explosive ideas via the medium of Pali. Still, if friendship with me is going to impede your progress in any way I will leave your house right now and go elsewhere. I have had your food for a few days at least and as a Maharashtrian I would be ashamed to heap disadvantage over you."

Bapu's frank but firm rejoinder floored Dey. He did not want to lose Bapu completely. He was not malicious, just possessive. He backed out, but smartly, saying he would probe into the angle a little more deeply and then give his final verdict in the matter.

The next day Dey tendered an olive branch:

"I am sorry that yesterday I behaved in such a way as to have caused you grief. I have come to know after making inquiries that your association with the National College will not affect me in any way. You may stay in my house and feel free to work for the National College." He said. On top of such volteface he even took to dropping Bapu at the National College in his car every day as proof of his wholehearted support.

Bapu did not find many students at the National College. Still all of the five or six that he had were hardworking. Two of them got Harvard degrees in 1915. However, the fact that the salary would never help him pay off the debt and support the family preyed heavily on Bapu's mind. Also he had to navigate himself through one more squabble.

Arvind Ghosh, the founder principal of the College, soon got accused in the court case over the matter of singing Vande Mataram and had to resign. His post was handed over to Satishchandra Mukerji. He entertained malicious doubts about Bapu. He had been hostile towards Bapu's appointment too. After he became the principal he adjured Bapu not to teach a single word about Buddhism in his class.

"In that case the sooner you close down the Pali class the better it would be," Bapu retorted. "for a Pali book that is not related to Buddhism is a rare find.

"I am not objecting to your teaching the contents of the Pali book. But for heaven's sake don't ask the students to become Buddhists."

"I am not here as a Buddhist missionary. If at all I want to sermonise about Buddhism I would find some other pulpit for it. But I feel dutybound to properly expostulate whatever has been written in those Pali books. If you are going to object to that I would like to tender my resignation as of now," Bapu spoke out. He was very combustible on certain points.

Mukerji swallowed humble pie. This was their last tirade, both titans in their own way. They never had an argument again. The students in the College had formed a good opinion about Bapu. So Mukerji too had to purge himself of the untoward prejudice. In the end, like Dey, he too made a complete volteface and pressed Bapu to give lectures on Buddhism for the benefit of the students.

The trip back home just could not be postponed any more. Bapu was being inundated by letters and was yearning to get back too. Since his lodging and boarding expenses were being borne by Dey he had managed to save enough money for the train ticket. He had a month's vacation coming up in October for the Kali Puja. He decided to use it for his home trip. Characteristically he was in no hurry to do so; he could not get there without making a halt at Amraoti where he had his old friends Govindrao Kane and others. Kane, helpful as ever, informed him that Dr. Bhandarkar had had a radical change of heart vis-a-vis him and would love to meet him some time. Bapu accepted the statement with a pinch of salt for he recollected that Bhandarkar had really been very cross with him when he set out for Banaras from Pune. But Kane was not exaggerating.

"That is true. After I met you in 1904 I met Bhandarkar at Lonavala. At that time we happened to talk about you *en passant* and he commented that you were crazy. He even barred me from talking about you. But I recounted your entire life story to him. After he came to know that you have acquired mastery over Pali he became very eager to talk to you. He has left a message for you with me that you should make it a point to meet him if ever you came here."

This was real good news for Bapu's feelings towards the great scholar and Indologist were still those of high reverence. Still he did not want to waste time by making a detour to Pune. He had decided to embark on a steamer at Mumbai for Murgaoon. However, he was destined to meet Bhandarkar. At that time the Prarthana-Samaj of Mumbai was celebrating its annual day and Kane knew it. He took it for granted that

Dr. Bhandarkar would be there and sent him a telegram at the address of the Prarthana-Samaj. The ploy achieved wonderful results. Devdatta Bhandarkar, Bhandarkar's son, also a Sanskrit scholar and Indologist of proven high merit, came to receive Bapu at the station. But somehow they missed each other. Bapu went to the Sukha-Nivas lodge near Portuguese Church, Girgaum, checked in, had early lunch and then visited the home of Prof. Shridhar Bhandarkar, another son.

Dr. Bhandarkar received Bapu with touching warmth and affection. He insisted that Bapu gave a talk on the biography of the Buddha. Bapu agreed. At the function Bhandarkar introduced Bapu in glowing terms omitting no detail from the scholar's extraordinary life. "At Pune I had indeed assessed him as a promising young man. But had never envisaged that he could achieve this much through sheer dint of hard work." Bhandarkar commented. More than the talk this introduction by the renowned pundit made Bapu.

Bapu proceeded to Mumbai and thence to Murgaoon. On disembarking, instead of going to Sankhwal directly he visited Bhiku Naik and Vishnu Naik at Madgaon. He was overwhelmed by guilt for having walked away without bidding adieu and leaving Ramchandradada to face all those financial responsibilities. The two old chums experienced a little difficulty recognizing Bapu. He had been a scrawny, sad-eyed, raw young man dressed in coarse dhoti and half-sleeved shirt. Now he was bearded and looked like a Bengali attired in a long dhoti and zabba.

"Bapu! You have become a pakka Bengali Babu!" They shrieked with joy, exceedingly enthralled to see Bapu suddenly turn up at their doorstep. The Portuguese had imported some cars; a taxi service had been started and they hired one to take them to Sankhwal.

The news of his arrival had spread like wild fire. Soon a large crowd turned up there, agog with excitement. Ramchandradada was there. He had crossed fifty and looked distraught. The aunt had passed away, her property at Kholgad had been sold and Ramchandradada was back at Sankhwal. His sons, their wives, grandsons, Bala, everybody rushed out. They too had some difficulty recognizing him. But once they did, it was sheer hysteria, everybody having fits of sobbing and crying.

"Why do you cry? Am I not here with you now?" Bapu kept muttering. But no one was in a mood to listen to him. These were tears of joy, guilt and bottled up sorrow.

Manik was there and crying too. But hers were tears of fear. She

had not taken to Sankhwal and she did not like the bearded man they were telling her was her father. Long after the others stopped their cries she continued to wail to be taken to Chikhali. All the Laud brothers turned up within hours of hearing the news.

"Would you take Bala with you?" Dada asked. He had taken time off his practise just to ask this one question.

"I don't mind. But my salary is a pittance, only thirty rupees per month."

"I don't care, I will live on rice and water," Bala snapped. She too had been hovering behind the door of the Big Room to hear the answer.

Bapu's lips parted in a shy smile. He was possessed of unshakable reserve as far as Bala was concerned.

"She has become quite a behemoth," Mangu averred by way of an oblique apology. "She has the run of our house. She has a free hand in everything."

"I like that. Behemoths are particularly useful to me for I am no good at managing a household."

"You are not a born family man at all. But you are not a born recluse either. And now that you have found out somehow we will manage our menage," Bala said saucily.

Mangu looked worried. But Bapu roared with laughter flashing his set of robust pearlwhite teeth. The couple left for Calcutta by the end of October leaving Manik in Kakibai's care.

FOURTEEN

October 1906 – April 1907

Bala thoroughly enjoyed the train journey, her first one, slow and overly long though it was, more than thirty six hours from Mumbai. She had never been on a train, was familiar with boats, steamers, horse buggies and cars. Time flew on wings as she had Bapu to herself finally; he had been overwhelmingly buffeted by massive throngs in Goa. He talked matter-of-factly of his adventures and hardships, the books that he had read and the people that he had met. It was a totally different world, never before seen or even envisaged by anyone in Goa. People had been full of questions about these six years in Bapu's life. Even total strangers who had never heard of him before turned up just to satisfy their curiosity and express awe, respect, adulation and joy. Bapu too loved to receive them and talk of his adventures. So far Bala had heard these tales from behind doors or at huge family scenes which were like conferences. Now she just loved to listen to them all over again in the course of a tête-a-tête.

She was filled with pride for her husband, never once tiring of listening to his adventures. She had quickly got out of her traumas and fears that she had suffered during the past six years; everyone had. She had quickly got out of her faded saris which she had been wearing lackadaisically having lost the verve to counterattack the ugly rumours and barbs flung at her. Now she had gone back to once again wearing Belgaum cottons or cottonsilks. Dada had ordered two pairs for her the day he received Bapu's letter. He had given her two more when she had moved to Sankhwal. Now for Calcutta he had thrown in four more pairs. For the train travel she had chosen a chocolate brown gold-bordered sari and a pale orange choli. Her thick bangles, pearl flowers, nose star and two gold chains were back. Bapu too had received many gifts of apparel, but had seen no reason to change his attire. He continued to be the Bengali Babu, dressed in long, flowing dhoti, zabba and a shawl over it.

Kashba had packed an enormous hamper containing the usual foodstuff, dry fish, spices, pickles, papads, dried sections of jackfruit and snacks.

"Why should we carry so much luggage? Calcutta is a big city.

The people there are fishlovers too." Bapu had registered a mild complaint. Bala had not bothered to argue. But she didn't leave the hamper behind either. Belligerent otherwise, in Bapu's presence she was softer and weaker than a cotton ball. However she expressed her reactions to Mangu, her perennial confidante.

"How can I leave this stuff behind? It is not a Sanyasi's hut under a tree. It is going to be a home, our home. VIPs will visit him there and friends. I need to offer something to them."

"And who is going to eat the river fish there? The Bengalis eat river fish. They don't touch fish from the sea. Exactly opposite of what we do."

"That is why Bapu gets along divinely with them. Here he broke off with everyone." Bala laughed, a soft but ebullient gurgling laughter which had left her for years, but was back now.

They took a steamer to Mumbai and stayed at Solicitor Dixit's place. He had a car now. His wife gave Bala a tour of Mumbai which the latter just loved. The next day they boarded the train.

Dey had sent two servants to receive them. At home his wife and mother were keenly looking forward to meeting Bala. Dey had moved Bapu's stuff from the outhouse and installed the couple in a room in the house. A small kitchen had been readied for the couple. Bala just loved it. In less than a week she picked up enough Bengali for a perfunctory conversation with the two helpful ladies and friends who visited Dey and Bapu. Bapu made it a point to introduce her to all these. He briefed her about their life stories, jobs, social work and so on. Bala loved this world of elites even though she lived in it only peripherally and sometimes even vicariously.

Bapu was very busy with his lectures, students and books. He had lost all interest in the food that he ate very frugally. Also, he had continued to be a vegetarian even though he was no more a monk. Bala however cooked the scrumptious fish curries she was so fond of. Dey's wife and mother too were forming a taste for it. Soon the couple had good news, two actually. Bala became pregnant and Bapu was upgraded to the post of a university lecturer at a salary of one hundred rupees per month plus six to nine hundred rupees annually by way of examiner's fees. This meant the end of scrimping. Was Bala happy!

This time the higher post had been procured for Bapu by Dey. He had secured first class in M.A. with Pali. He was delirious and gave credit for this performance to Bapu alone. True to form he also inveigled himself a seat in the syndicate of the university with the help of Justice

Ashutosh Mukerji. Sir Ashutosh Mukerji was a judge of the Calcutta High Court and the founder of the University of Calcutta. Because of Dey's enormous clout he could get Bapu a salary of one hundred rupees by adopting a resolution to that effect at a meeting of the Syndicate. Except for one more all other professors worked gratis.

Bapu had no hesitation accepting this post for he was really hardpressed for money. Even though Bala never made any demands the thought of the debt home kept needling him inordinately. At the same time he had made up his mind to continue to teach gratis at the National College. There he found the grass root students and he really loved to teach them Pali from the basics.

Bala's second pregnancy turned out to be far difficult. She couldn't retain any food and was almost bedridden. She kept telling herself and Bapu too, that matters would improve after a couple of months. But it became increasingly hard for Bapu to keep her at Calcutta; Dey was doing enough. Bapu didn't want to burden him with more responsibilities, nor was he himself in a position to attend to Bala personally. His hands were full with his own work already. So in January 1907, he took a few days off and escorted Bala to Chikhali. Now that Bala was gone he did not deem it right to pile on Dey's hospitality. By now the Mahabodhi Sabha too had moved into better premises. Dharmapal had made a room available here for Bapu. The latter lost no time in taking advantage of the offer. He was not very happy accepting help from Dey because in no way could he return his favours.

In July Bala gave birth to a son who was named Damodar after Bapu's grandfather. He was much smaller than Manik, but fair. Still he was a son and Bala was happy.

"You don't need a son to take care of you, Bala!" Dada teased her as she lay huddled up in the quilts in that small room at Kashba's house. He too was happy about Bapu's imminent lectureship at the university at a good salary.

"I do. With Kosambi you can never tell," she jested, brimming with happiness. She had never spoken out truer words. She hadn't found it out at the time but Bapu was disgruntled with life in Calcutta and was toying with the idea of getting back to Maharashtra, no matter what it cost the family.

Narshabhat turned up the very next day. He predicted a phenomenally good future for the boy and assured Bala that because of the good stars in his horoscope the father too would reach greater heights of success.

"He will mint money. And Bapu too," the priest ranted.
"What about his education?"

"Allow me to complete my say, Balabai! He would be a scholar. He would surpass his father." The priest had come fully prepared. He knew that Bala placed a very high value on education.

Bala smiled repletely passing him a ten rupee note. This was a fortune. The priest's eyes popped out when he saw it.

"Bapu has been made a lecturer of the University of Calcutta. I don't have a single anxiety in the world," she explained.

"You won't The son has brought you immense good luck."

Bapu had been overcome with the characteristic inquietude almost from the first day of joining the university. He had two or three students and needed to teach barely for three hours. But instead of making him happy this was making him irate. Now that job opportunities had opened up for Pali many students had been drawn to the subject. But their interest was not in Buddhism. They looked upon it as a means to provide them with a lucrative job. Bapu's resentment of this attitude on their part deprived him of job satisfaction.

"The two or three students who had enrolled for Pali were not desirous of accomplishing a thorough mastery over Pali. Their target was to somehow clear the exam, get a degree and find a job or get a promotion. All in all I cannot record any real advantage except fame. It needs to be remembered that I felt and still do that my main goal in life was to spread the knowledge of Pali, a knowledge that I had achieved after facing inordinate hardships. Therefore even although I could have enjoyed many other advantages at Calcutta, from this viewpoint they all seemed negligible." *Nivedan*, chapter sixteen.

One more reason for his discontentment was Dey's growing addiction to drinking. Dey's love for drinking was known to everybody. But Bapu had talked him out of it. His mother was deeply grateful to Bapu for this. Now somehow Dey slipped back into the habit. He had been transferred to Hooghly for a while and this triggered a relapse. Later on he found a job as a librarian at the Imperial College. The salary figure was astronomical, eleven hundred rupees per month. Nothing could hold him back. He rented a room at the Calcutta club and overtly indulged in binges. Since Bapu did not live with him any more this came as a shock when some good-intentioned friends of Dey requested Bapu to talk him out of it. Bapu visited him at this room. But could see that he exerted no more influence on Dey. Dey defied him brazenly and kept drinking in his presence. The sight of that

demoralized character made Bapu want to run away to the other end of the earth.

Yet somehow Bapu stuck to the job, telling himself to have patience till the debt was paid off. Ever since joining the university he had begun to pay off the interest. But paying the principal seemed difficult. Bapu found this job, which everyone was full of praises for, inadequate. To make matters worse, Ram Naik Banawlikar, a friend, filed a court case claiming that he had the title to the orchard. This was in August 1907, a month after Damodar was born. Banawlikar had bought these dubious rights from the son of a goldsmith and triggered a massive controversy by claiming ownership of the orchard. If Ramchandradada lost the orchard he and his family would have to sit by the roadside and beg! They had no other income.

As usual this controversy led to Bapu's tiff with Dada. In the December of 1907, Bapu attended the Congress session at Surat. He took a few days off and visited Goa. Typically he wanted to visit Ram Naik and settle the matter amicably.

"What kind of amicable settlement do you have in mind?" Dada asked, irate already. He had always been a hardball-player and had no understanding for such unseemly and unrequired soft measures. To him this was close to cowardice.

"I don't mind paying him a small sum and purchasing the rights from him."

"Purchase the rights? You know that they have been concocted. You shouldn't even visit him. If you allow one fraudulent man to take advantage of you and eke money out of you, many more will turn up. There will be a whole charade." This was Dada's philosophy for keeping his own hard-earned money to himself. It was the key to the success of his practise. He also wanted to add that Bapu's money was Bala's money too and wasn't it time the poor girl lived somewhat comfortably? But bridled himself in time for he still wasn't quite sure that Bapu had changed. Somehow he was the only one who felt instinctively that Bapu was the same at heart, weird unpractical and unfocused on the interests of his family.

"Naik has all the time and money in the world to outsmart us. I am too far away. I do not have tons of money either. It is better to compromise."

"Everybody is not a saint. If you pay him any money he will try more such ideas on others. You would be playing into the hands of a villain and a rogue. Surely you, with all that love for reforming the

world, do not want to do this? Let a rogue loose?" Dada became madder. Bapu remained unconvinced. Excellent friends though they were, their philosophies clashed and they found themselves on two different sides of a battleground. This was not the first time. Yet it needled with the same degree of anguish.

"I had a talk with Bapu, But got nowhere," Dada confided angrily to his father and brothers. The Buddha has not said, thou shall not fight for your property," he added morosely.

"The Buddha cannot. He has asked for its renunciation." Mangu pointed out chirpily and received blank looks from everybody for the flippancy.

Finally Bapu acted against the advise of almost everyone and visited Ram Naik. The visit turned out to be absolutely futile. His confidence bolstered by Bapu's visit, Ram Naik began to ask for a prohibitive sum for the land. Almost the price of its purchase. And when Bapu wouldn't come up with the sum - he couldn't, he just didn't have it - Ram Naik filed a criminal case on Ramchandradada. Ramchandradada was taken into custody by the police.

Bapu got him released on bail. Now there was no alternative but to file a court case against Naik. The matter dragged on for years. The District Judge gave a verdict against Ram Naik. But Naik appealed to the High Court. Here too he lost the case. Ramchandradada got his orchard and a little peace. But Bapu had to spend a lot of money for the trouble, almost all the savings that he had put together at Calcutta, nearly one thousand rupees. For somebody imbibed in say, Dada's philosophy, such a loss of savings would have meant greater impetus to earn more. Not Bapu. He just plunged deeper into his characteristic despondency.

"I was assailed by strong doubts whether or not I could ever pay back my father's debts. As soon as I had undertaken a job at the university this childhood chum had connived this court matter and without the least foresight even built up a legal case on the strength of a few untruthful witnesses!... Under such circumstances even if I paid off my father's debts and got his lands cleared of the mortgage what would be the outcome? Would we have to face many more such suits? Harassed by such doubts I lost my interest in the payment of the debt too The purpose for which I accepted a job here (at Calcutta) could not be achieved. The students in Bengal did not seem to be benefitting from me. And the friend (Dey) who helped me and promoted me to this extent seemed to be plunging deeper and deeper in the quagmire of bad

habits. I had no strength left in me to help him. All these conclusions beset my mind with invincible turbulence. I began to long to leave Calcutta and fulfil my duty elsewhere as per my ability." *Nivedan*, chapter sixteen.

FIFTEEN

April 1908 - February 1910

That alternative turned out to be a honorarium of fifty rupees per month by Sayajirao Gaekwad, the Prince of the State of Baroda!

In the month of April, 1908 a telegram arrived at Sankhwal from the court of Baroda. It was addressed to Bapu. "If you are going to stay in any city in Maharashtra you would be given fifty rupees per month by the State of Baroda. The aid will continue for a period of three years. However you should write a book every year for the government of Baroda," it said. Somehow the Kosambis interpreted it to mean that Bapu had found a job in Maharashtra, his favourite place, and that his income was going to be fortified by this honorarium from the State of Baroda. Naively they spread the good news all over Goa.

Bala was at Sankhwal when the telegram was received. Patiently she was waiting for Bapu to rent a flat at Calcutta and take her and the nine month old Baba there. Like at Chikhali at Sankhwal too she was the boss. There was no harassment of any sort. In fact there was no one to give her orders. But she had always wanted to be with Bapu. She had repeatedly said that life with one's in-laws, whether good or bad, was hell in the absence of the husband. She was just sticking it out. Manik continued to be at Chikhali for her school was there.

The Lauds were not happy about this state of affairs either. After an absence of six years Bapu had come back and set up a home with Bala and now it was irksome for them to find that home gone and even become dubious as the days passed by. But they did not want to make an issue of it and risk sending Bapu on a sanyas trip all over again. Still they continued to drop discreet hints. They wrote to Bapu and asked if he had found anything suitable. Bapu kept writing back that he hadn't. Every now and then he mentioned that he was fed up of his present job and wanted to get back to Pune or Mumbai, but added that nothing concrete had crossed his path. Bala too interpreted the telegram the same way and was jubilant.

"Bapu is groping to make more money. He has found a job close by and the State of Baroda too is giving him something," Suresh, Ramchandradada's twenty year old son, informed Dada handing over the telegram.

Dada was filled with apprehension when this supposedly glad news was imparted to him. He took all good news concerning Bapu with a pinch of salt. This particular one was no exception.

"Whereabouts in Maharashtra? Has Bapu mentioned another job to you? Has the Bombay University included Pali as a subject for Arts students in its curriculum?" he asked. Suresh remained mum. He had no answers to these questions. In fact such questions hadn't even assailed the minds of the Kosambis. They had just assumed that life for Bapu and for them through Bapu would be a bed of roses. Not Dada. There were more fears in his mind than joys so far as Bapu's decisions were concerned.

Dada's hunches were soon found to be accurate. A letter from Bapu arrived soon informing the Kosambis as well as the Lauds that he would be residing at Pune or Mumbai and living on the remuneration of fifty rupees per month. The Kosambis remained nonchalant. For the new generation Bapu was an elder, they were in no position to dictate common sense or any other terms to him and Ramchandradada had given it up long time back.

But the Lauds were livid when they heard of this madness, Dada the most. He didn't even want to meet Bapu and find out his reasons behind this bizarre decision. He feared that he would lose his temper and subsequently a friend. Soon Bapu was home for the summer vacation. He would visit Chikhali too. But his mind was made up already. Bala had conveyed his plan to live in Maharashtra. He felt he would have a more meaningful life there. Surprisingly Bala did not mind. Anything for a home, was her attitude. She understood that fifty rupees was a comedown, still she saw no problem in managing a household, provided she had one. She would be happy in Mumbai or Pune or wherever. She had always said that she would set up home anywhere with Bapu and under any condition.

Dada sent Mangu to probe a little more into this offer, stupidity according to them all.

"Mangu! ask Bala to change his mind. Be discreet. Talk to her in confidence. We should not be seen as interfering. If Bapu has not resigned from his job he could still keep it. Bala could make it happen if she uses her persuasive skills well," he enjoined.

"I am starting. But Bapu did not specify a salary when he took the wedding oath. He just said he would look after Bala. And I wonder how persuasive Bala could be vis-a-vis him. She is an embodiment of obedience whenever she faces him," Mangu averred.

Dada lost his temper.

"Mangu! Fight the battle on our behalf! Don't you join the Bapu camp!"

"Certainly! I would not cross over. I am just pointing out the limitations of our effort," Mangu continued. Even though a drop-out from school he had no hesitation in bandying his opinions and this placed him on an equal footing with his doctor brother. He was good at managing their paddy fields, orchards and cattle. He still wore short dhotis and shirts. But had grown his hair to a two inch length like Dada and many others. The *shendi* was intact.

Mangu was very good at such espionage. He came back with reports of all the not-so-multisplendoured aspects of the situation. He had found Bala jubilant and dreaming about her next home.

"Narshabhat was right! Mangu! My son has changed my husband. I had fears that Bapu would live happily ever after at the Mahabodhi Sabha and penalise me to a permanent stay at Sankhwal becoming a visiting husband for good. But no! He wants to set up home at Mumbai or Pune," She said, her luminous eyes lit up with immense joy.

"Bala! If he hasn't resigned from his present job why don't you talk him out of this senseless step? You have two kids now. Don't you know that fifty is far less than hundred?"

"It is okay. I have managed a home in thirty rupees. Plain calculation would tell you that fifty is more than thirty."

"But he is past the stage of earning thirty. He got promoted...."

"He did. But he did not like the job. I would much rather have a home that a big salary."

"Surely he wouldn't think of getting into monkhood now if you registered a mild grouse?"

"Who can tell? Supposing he does? What will I do then? You too don't argue with him over this step. He has always held that money should not be the driving force of our life. It should be ideas, a good purpose, a good goal. It is also clear that the kids or I are not the driving force of his life either. He considers us as unshakable responsibilities. There was a time when I resented this. But now I am happy with this much."

She did have a point there. It was evident that she was not going to try to persuade him to think in terms of money.

"I tried my level best. Now it is upto Bala to act," Mangu reported to Dada. Dada understood that he hadn't gotten anywhere with her.

The Lauds settled down to a heart-to-heart, serious discussion about Bapu's decision, in other words for Bala's future. They had purposely not invited Bala to participate in it. They didn't want to derail her wonderful acceptance of the situation. Mangu had given them a complete feedback : Bapu had met the Prince Sayajirao Gaekwad, a renowned patron of scholars, writers and artists , at Calcutta in December 1906 when he had gone there to attend the Industrial Conference as its Chairman. This was but a fleeting meeting. But the Prince had asked Bapu to meet him some day at Baroda. Bapu went there in July 1907, when he took time off to see his son. The Prince had arranged his lecture on Buddhism. Bapu had given one, his speciality by now, and the Prince had been exceedingly impressed. A little later he had Bapu summoned to Baroda and wondered in the course of their talk if Bapu would be interested in a job at one of the colleges in Baroda.

"Would you like to leave Calcutta and do some work here?" The prince asked.

"I have no desire to earn money and become rich," Bapu answered. "If I find work that I like and get enough money for a living I would accept it."

"If you stay here I am ready to help you in everyway."

"Maharaja should not make it a condition that I should stay at Baroda. No matter where I stay I would not deviate from my duty of spreading the knowledge of Buddhism amidst our Maharashtrian brothers. I should be allowed to stay at Pune or Mumbai and carry on my work and the State of Baroda should help me earn a livelihood."

Sayajirao was naturally stunned. However, Bapu went up even higher in his esteem. He had mulled over Bapu's counter-request for a while and sent the telegram.

Dada was livid when he heard the details of the meeting.

"Is Baroda in the wilderness? Is it not closer than Calcutta? Is it not like Maharashtra? Many Maharashtrians are settled there. And Sayajirao would help with whatever plans Bapu has for that dead language! He would have willingly given him a salary of two hundred or more and a house to live in." His father and brothers had a hard time controlling him. Finally Kashba entreated him with tears in his eyes:

"Dada! You will not say a word of this to Bala! I do not want to break her heart nor her marriage."

"You think I want to?" Dada growled. But he was coming round

already. He cooled down as quickly as he boiled.

"You certainly don't. But may do it accidentally. When dealing with Kosambi we walk on egg shells, remember? Your own words."

Pathetic smiles spread on their faces.

"Should I try to reason with Bapu? I promise I will not be combusive," Dada asked.

"What good will it do? Do you really think Bapu is going to change his decision or his philosophy?"

Kashba asked warily. He too had accepted Bapu as he was. "If only Bapu fulfils his husbandly duty I will be happy. Husbandly duty does not include wealth."

"If you are all going to be full of lassitude and not going to move your little finger then Bapu is going to be a gone case."

"Okay, you may talk to him. But at your own risk. If he feels affronted and runs off it will be your responsibility alone." Kashba admonished. Dada was redfaced. But finally he didn't have his intended talk and Bapu remained blissfully impervious to the storm that he had stimulated in the Laud household.

Back at Calcutta Bapu informed Dey and Justice Mukerji of his plan to get back to Mumbai. However, a trip to Burma was on the cards before he left Calcutta for good. Hon'ble Mong Ba Tu, a Burmese citizen had invited Bapu to Burma and promised to give him all the published volumes of the *Tripitaka*. Bapu decided to take up the offer before going to Mumbai. The University of Calcutta too had given him three of four hundred rupees in order to buy all the Pali books published there. While at Rangoon Bapu picked up the opportunity to meet the Masters at Molmin. Even though he was no more in the Sangha they received him very well. Mong Ba Tu donated to him Pali books worth two hundred and fifty rupees. "They are still proving to be of use to me. All in all the trip turned out to be very meaningful," the key word for Bapu's decisions and behaviour.

"Shouldn't he be in a hurry to set up a home whatever his salary?" Dada continued to rasp.

"Marriage is not his priority." Mangu was intent on knocking this in Dada's mind. They had all given up knocking sensibility in Bapu's.

"It should be now. Manik will soon need to go to high school. You won't like to keep her with me for obvious reasons."

"There is time enough for that. She is eight. She could do the fourth standard in Chikhali." Mangu cleverly dodged the issue, that of

living in the same household as Magha . Bapu probably wouldn't mind, he reflected. Though no more a monk he was still a Buddhist and one of the Buddha's commandments had been for a casteless society. Buddha himself had accepted food from courtesans, and lowcaste people . But Bala would definitely object. She was steeped in tradition.

True to character, Bapu was to get embroiled in one more controversy, again not of his doing. Now that they were going to lose him the power behind the authorities at the University of Calcutta came up with one more offer, that of an astronomical salary of two hundred and fifty rupees per month and the examiner's fee. He could have his family over, find a nice house and live happily. Bapu turned it down. This time the only reason for his refusal was his reluctance to break the word given to Sayajirao.

"I have no words to describe the perturbed state of my mind. My mind oscillated violently and for a long time between the pull of the salary of two hundred and fifty rupees per month and the fear of jettisoning my sworn duty. But finally my resolution not to bypass my duty was affirmed and I felt happy for this. The very next day I packed all my books in a bag and sent it with Anand Madgaonkar to Mumbai. I said to his father Dinanath Madgaonkar: "Today I am exhilarated for I conquered temptation by the grace of the Buddha and the Bodhisattva." [Dinanath Madgaonkar was a contemporary of Dr. Bhandarkar, Justice Ranade etc. and their colleague at Mumbai in the sphere of social and religious reform. His son Govind rose to become the Judge of the Mumbai High Court. All the Madgaonkars were close to Dharmanand". *Nivedan*, chapter, seventeen.

This was in keeping with his character. Temptation to have his family with him had gripped his mind once in Colombo and he had fought it by entering the Order. By now he had become an expert at quashing all kinds of temptations.

He left Calcutta under the pretext of visiting Sayajirao at Baroda and seeking permission from him to continue at Calcutta. In actuality he did nothing of the sort. He just came down to Mumbai and communicated his decision to Dey and the others by a letter. He thanked them and explained to them that he feared that his acceptance of their proposal would be misconstrued as his wish to chase money and this particular fear had driven him to tender his resignation.

If Dada had heard of this offer he would have tied up Bapu in ropes and handed him over to Dey or Mukerji or even Bala. As it happened he heard of this when it was too late.

SIXTEEN

October 1908 – February 1910

By now Bapu had a large friend circle, all elites, at Mumbai too. There were the members of the Prarthana Samaj, the Bhandarkar and Madgaonkar families who were very close to him, in a way they were his mentors, the Chitpavan circle he had met at Solicitor Dixit's, as also innumerable Goans settled in Mumbai. Very soon an important friend was added to this circle, Dr. Vasudeo Anant Sukhthankar alias Anna. Anna was junior, to him by eight months. He was born at Islampur, a small village near Kolhapur, on the 22nd of June, 1877. He came of a not-so-rich family but had stuck it out and secured a M.A. in philosophy from the Fergusson College, Pune. Ever since his young age he was interested in religion in general. He had been a very active member of the Prarthana Samaj. After completing M.A. he secured a scholarship for comparative religion at the Manchester College, Oxford. From there he went to Bonn, Germany, on another scholarship. There he secured a doctorate by writing a thesis on Ramanujacharya's qualified monism.

Anna and Bapu took to each other like long lost friends. He was to remain Bapu's friend, philosopher and guide for life. He edited Bapu's books, found publishers, introduced him to people, looked after his family and helped him at all junctures in his life, performing innumerable chores for him unsolicited. Without Anna Bapu's life might not have taken the upward turn that it did.

Anna's wife, Mary, was British, the daughter of the Reverend Bishop of Manchester. She didn't wear a sari. But spoke Marathi fluently and mixed delightedly with Anna's friends. Everybody called her Mamma, even those who were far older than her. Anna lived in Mumbai and worked full time for the Prarthana Samaj. He was a familiar figure in the Girgaon area. Dressed in dhoti or trousers, long coat, shoes and a turban round his mop of thick curly hair.

Dr. Woods, professor of Sanskrit at Harvard, had been Anna's classmate at Bonn. He had come down to Mumbai to brush up his Sanskrit. He had heard of Bapu from Anna and longed to meet him. Bapu's fluency in English had a special appeal for him. He had been living at Matheran when Bapu reached Mumbai. But sent money for the tickets and asked Anna to bring him over. Anna was quick to

oblige. Scholars that they were they struck instant bonding. Not only did Dr. Woods get drawn to Bapu as a dedicated scholar and a warm and sincere person, he got interested in learning Pali too. But at that point nothing worthwhile could be undertaken.

In November Dr. Woods returned to Mumbai. He lived in a room at the Taj Mahal Hotel. He now expressed a wish to learn Pali from Bapu. However a daily trip to Borivali from the hotel was out of question. Anna quickly found a solution. He rented two rooms for Bapu near the premises of the Prarthana Samaj. He even helped him to shift. Dr. Woods gladly paid the expenses and continued to pay the rent. In fact he wished to have Bapu over to the hotel to teach him. But Anna had doubts that the proud man would take kindly to such a suggestion. So Woods dropped the matter. Every day he drove in a taxi to the chawl and learnt Pali.

Bala loved her new home. It was close to the Samaj. Bapu took her. There without fail for all the meetings and gettogethers. There were neighbours too here. Life had been kind of lonely at Borivali. She made many friends. She had got a couple of maidservants over from Chikhali. So she was free to visit friends in Bapu's company or to attend the sermons at the Samaj. She spoke Marathi fluently now and had picked up a smattering of English. She had given up wearing bordered cholis. Instead she wore long chintz blouses.

In February 1909, Dr. Woods went back to Harvard. The rooms at Girgaum became pointless now. Bapu decided to settle at Pune where he was acquainted with many scholars and where he could be near Dr. Bhandarkar. Anna had gone to Lahore; he had found a professor's job there. Bala was pregnant again. Bapu took her and Baba to Chikhali. On the 25th of August Bala gave birth to a baby girl in that same room. She was not as fair as Manik, but equally beautiful. Bapu named her Manorama, a fashionable name from Mumbai.

The delivery had been very easy. Bala recuperated within a few days and in September she was back at Pune with Mangu and a couple of servants to take charge of her new home.

"There is no fish in Pune," Mangu had teased her. Pune was not a coastal place and most of the populace was strictly vegetarian.

"That is okay. Kosambi is there," Bala had replied, her lips parted in a broad joyful grin. She would live on dry fish of course.

This time Manik too had come with her. They enrolled her in the New English school. Bapu had rented a minuscule place in the Sadashiv Peth. But soon found another which was only slightly better

than the first one, in the Raviwar Peth. It was a little more expensive, the monthly rent was six rupees. But it had an extra room which he could use as a study. Here he spent his entire day reading and writing. He copied some parts of the *Vishuddhimarga* in the Devnagari script, translated the *Bodhicharya-Avatar* in Marathi and wrote a brief grammar of Pali in Sanskrit. He also gave five lectures in various places at Baroda. They were published later on in a book titled *Buddha, Dharma and Sangha*.

A large part of the fifty rupees remuneration that he received from the Baroda government was spent on his books and other activities. Running the household with whatever remained was no joke. However, Bala's brothers helped. As soon as Manik's school closed down for Diwali and summer vacations Bala went back to Chikhali and came back with tons of foodstuff, clothes and shoes for the children and saris and English sandals for herself. Dr. Bhandarkar was trying to get Pali incorporated in the curriculum of the Bombay University. Everybody expected that as soon as this was done Bapu would get a professor's job at the Fergusson College. Bala was not worried about a job for him. Her life was very comfortable, thanks to her helpful brothers. She had made many friends in Pune too, amidst the neighbours and the members of the Prarthana Samaj. She specially loved the visits to Chikhali where she enjoyed very high prestige now. Gone were the days of taunts and barbs. Everybody was a friend. They admired her modern ways and some were even envious of her independence. Most of the women didn't give a thought to Bapu's salary. Their own lives revolved around an endless circle of chores, cooking, cleaning, storing, milking and so on. They had no concept of money. But the Lauds hoped that Bapu's prospects would improve. He deserved to do better, they felt.

However, before Pali could be incorporated in the curriculum of Bombay University, Bapu's life received one of those sudden turns it had been known for. In the February of 1910 he received a letter from Dr. Woods. Professor Warren, who had been editing the *Vishuddhimarga* had passed away. After him Professor Lanman had been assigned the job. However, it was not showing much progress. Therefore Dr. Woods had requested Bapu to visit Harvard and complete it. Indeed he was in so much of a hurry that he had given his telegraphic address for confirmation. As soon as the confirmation was received Bapu was to receive 1800 rupees by telegraphic return for his passage.

Was Bapu elated! That letter was a windfall. It had opened up a double opportunity for Bapu: the editing of his favourite Pali book

and travel to a newer and more fascinating country. He wasted no time in sending his acceptance. He sent a telegram to Anna too. Equally exulted, Anna wrote back that he would soon arrive in Mumbai for the summer vacation and help him organize his baggage etc. The news spread like wild fire to all his friends at Pune and Mumbai. He received letters of congratulations from everyone.

"That a man who had spent the first twenty two years of his life in a backward region like Goa and most of the latter years in the Monastery at Kashi or the viharas of the Buddhists was now forced to travel to America was but little short of a miracle. I had never donned trousers, never thrust my feet into shoes, never had a single meal at the table as per the European etiquette. Readers better imagine the state of my mind under the circumstances. Still I was not as petrified as I should have been for I had frequently travelled through unknown countries and at Calcutta had become familiar with the European life style of some of my friends." *Nivedan*, chapter eighteen.

Bapu had written to Sayajirao too. He had sought the latter's consent for the assignment at Harvard. Even though this was a matter of fifty rupees only Bapu wanted to honour the assignment. Sayajirao was quick to send him a congratulatory letter. He also sent five hundred rupees to be used for the publication of '*Buddha, Dharma and Sangha*'. He too had booked his passage to New York. He invited Bapu to join him. However, Bapu tactfully turned down the offer. The money from Harvard had arrived along with detailed instructions from Dr. Woods. Bapu did not want to effect any change in the plan.

Either this five hundred rupees covered the rest of the remuneration due for the three year period mentioned in the contract. Or the contract just got reneged because Bapu left Maharashtra. As per the terms of the contract he was obliged to live in Maharashtra. Whatever it was there was no money from Baroda once Bapu had left for Boston.

Anna came down in April. He helped Babu select a suit and some woollens. He gave more instructions and even edited the book amidst all this turmoil. Mamma gave him a letter for the Reverend Bishop, her father.

Bala was exceedingly proud of her husband, yet not exactly happy. How long would he be gone? This question assailed her mind constantly and escalated her anguish. All in all she had lived with him for less than three years, a year at Sankhwal, four months at Calcutta and approximately fourteen months at Pune. Considering that they had been living together as husband and wife since the end of 1898 this was

a dismal record, two and half years out of twelve years.

Bapu was not worried about her mental state, only for the expenses of the household. He himself was so good at suppressing anguish, longing and other failings that he never imagined that others were having any problems doing it. Anyway Bala never confided her turmoils to him.

"I cannot send you to Chikhali, Bala! Manik has to go to school and Baba has to start too. But don't worry, I will be sending you money. If you need anything, contact Anna or Dr. Bhandarkar or one of the Madgaonkars. I have instructed them to look after you," he said to her. She nodded meekly.

On the 20th of April, Bapu bid adieu to his family at the railway station of Pune and went to Mumbai. On the 23rd of April 1910, he set out for England on a P& O steamer named Mantua. Balwantrao Madgaonkar and some other friends gave him a send-off at the dock.

Bala went to Chikhali since the school was closed for summer.

"You could move in with us till Bapu returns," her father said to her.

I can't. Bapu is very keen on giving the kids a good education. He does not want me to pull Manik out of the school. In fact he wants me to send Baba there too in the nursery class," Bala answered morosely.

"Mangu will keep coming. But he can't stay there permanently. Life would be difficult."

"I know. But I will manage. He has friends. He has asked them to look after me."

"I am not happy about the arrangement."

"You have to be. Remember I am behemoth? Behemoths cannot balk at living alone. Anyway I am not going against Bapu's wishes. This is the first time he has shown interest in a home. Otherwise every time he goes somewhere I come here and we have no home. If I give up that home now maybe I won't have one ever."

"That is true. Let us not risk it."

So Bala went back to Pune with the three kids and without Mangu for he was tied down with supervision chores at their fields and orchards.

SEVENTEEN

February 1910 – February 1912

The unparalleled tsunami of surprise and adulation that buffeted Bapu after the receipt of Dr. Woods' letter had overlooked a one major pitfall, the absence of a proper contract. Bapu was the last to think of such mundane matters of course. But even world-travellers like the Bhandarkars and Madgaonkars failed to think of it. Anyway had somebody questioned Bapu about the existence of a contract it is doubtful whether he would have given it a thought and postponed his departure. For Dr. Woods the deadline had to be met immediately and Bapu too was in a great hurry to make it to Harvard.

Despite this Bapu wholeheartedly enjoyed his trip. His joy remained unpolluted by any doubts. He had continued to be a vegetarian in spite of Bala's expertise in turning out delicious fish curries. He had four or five small meals on the ship comprising bread, biscuits, fruits and vegetables. A couple of days later the purser arranged for dal and rice for him and a few other vegetarians. Some of the Indian travellers had started bringing on all kinds of nonvegetarian stuff while a few didn't even touch any food served on the steamer. They lived on the fruits and crisp goodies they had carried with them from Mumbai.

Fate soon proved that even if Bapu did not pursue adventure, adventure dogged his footsteps.

The Maharaja of Holkar and his sister Sitabai were travelling on the Mantua with the European guardian of the Prince and a few others. Vithalrao Shinde, a missionary of the Prarthana Samaj, had found this out on the dock and then and there scribbled a short note addressed to Sitabai. The idea was that if at all Bapu was inconvenienced in anyway on the steamer these rich people would be of assistance.

[Shinde was an idealist. He secured a B.A. from the Fergusson College, then devoted himself to the activities of the Prarthana Samaj. With the help of the Prarthana Samaj he went to Oxford and studied Comparative Religion there. He worked very diligently for the eradication of untouchability. He founded many institutions, schools and hostels. He was an active political worker too. After the Nagpur Congress Mahatma Gandhi had appointed him as member of the

Congress Working Committee].

It was pretty obvious that Bapu was not going to be in need of assistance from Sitabai. As it turned out it was to be the other way round. Bapu who loved to meet people, sent Shinde's letter to Sitabai travelling in the first class. The good lady immediately called him over for a meeting. By the time they reached Marseilles they had already met four or five times. Just before reaching this port the steamer had been rocked severely by a choppy Mediterranean. Sitabai had been scared out of her wits; inquiries had informed her that the Bay of Bisquet was going to be worse. She was now in a hurry to get out of the steamer and reach Calais by train. The Prince was game: her companion, Indira, would travel with her. However, the guardian would not hear of having these two ladies travelling unescorted. Finally Sitabai requested Bapu to go with her and he complied. The arrangement gave him the chance of travelling through yet one more country and he thoroughly enjoyed it.

The guardian had warned Sitabai that the customs officers in France were inordinately strict; they might charge a very heavy duty for her expensive brocade saris and even confiscate them. So all her luggage and Bapu's too, had been sent via Thomas Cook directly to London and Liverpool, Bapu's destination in England. What Bapu did not know was that Sitabai had stuck to a handbagful of precious jewellery. He was stunned when she apprised him of this which was only after they had embarked at Marseilles. He cautioned her not to seem overly protective of the handbag so as to avert ungainly attention from the French officers and offered silent prayers for the evasion of likely disasters. Thankfully the prayers were answered.

For once Bapu was robbed of the pleasure of making use of a sign language. An agent of Thomas Cook gave them a conducted tour of Marseilles, then put them on a train, he also acted as their interpreter.

The train was as uncomfortable as the Thomas Cook Agent tip-hungry. There were no sleepers and seating arrangements too were cramped. However, they met a Muslim student who was very helpful. He gave them a lunch at Calais and directed them to the railway station. After they met him they did not have to kowtow to the agents of Thomas Cook.

A special bogey had been reserved for the Holkar entourage. Bapu took his charge there along with the loaded handbag and heaved a sigh of relief. He boarded another compartment in the same train. At the Charing Cross station he got into a Liverpool bound train. Then

looked for the address of the Archdeacon for whom Dr. Woods had given him a letter. The Archdeacon had passed away a year back. But a bishop was there. He gave Bapu the address of the Temperance Hotel.

Bapu's luggage had not been delivered yet by Thomas Cook. Also the steamer for Boston had just departed and the next one was ten to twelve days away. Bapu found time preying heavily on his mind. But thankfully a couple of days later he made a new friend, a Dutchman. He was a clerk at the Bank of Amsterdam. They were but fleeting acquaintances. They did not exchange addresses since they had no intention of keeping up a lifelong friendship. Indeed Bapu did not even remember or choose to record his name. However, he was one of the most important people in his life. He was the man who initiated Bapu into the tenets of socialism.

The Dutchman and Bapu spent the next three to four days roaming the city and having meals at cheap restaurants that served a vegetarian meal.

One day the Dutchman casually commented:

"Although the rich are very rich there is a lot of poverty here too. The condition of the workers is deplorable. Even though I am a trader I am in wholehearted agreement with writers like Karl Marx."

"Who is Karl Marx?"

"You haven't heard of Karl Marx? He is the founder of modern socialism. Caire, Hardy and others in England are his followers," he informed him.

"But what is socialism? In India we do not have this kind of movement."

"If you spend four weeks in Europe you would be automatically apprised of this movement. Still if you so wish I will buy you some books on this subject. An expense of five or six pennies would quickly initiate you in the doctrines of socialism."

And so it did. Bapu's friend led him to a book store nearby and helped him buy books authored by Blatchford and others.

"Out of these the book titled *Merry England* became my hot favourite. It cost only three pennies. I read it twice before reaching America. It hardened my desire to seek more information about socialism. After I made it to America I read many books and articles written by a variety of writers on the subject of socialism I also read the biography of Karl Marx written by John Spargo," *Nivedan*, chapter eighteen

At Harvard Bapu kept reading more books on the subject. By the end of his stay he was thoroughly indoctrinated and had made up his mind to take this new religion to his home country. The socialistic doctrines were very similar to the Buddhist ones of equality and even the Buddha's gospel of renunciation of property could be fitted in comfortably within the frame work of Karl Marx's vision of a classless society.

After the friend's departure Bapu undertook a brief trip to Manchester to meet Reverend Bishop and thence to Leatham to spend a couple of days with Ramchandra Vishnu Madgaonkar, father of Balwantrao. Reverend Bishop was surprised that Bapu found his address on his own steam. He kept Bapu in his own house and took him around. He was a vegetarian too. So it worked out very well, there was no problem concerning Bapu's meals. However, Bapu found out that the Reverend was an exceptionally broadminded man and that some of the other Britons, even the elites, had a very low opinion of the Indians and did not hesitate to flaunt it. Ramchandra Madgaonkar was overjoyed to have Bapu with him. He kept him at Leatham for three or four days. From there Bapu went directly to Liverpool to embark on the steamer *Davonian* belonging to the Leyland company.

The steamer was not crowded at this time of the year. There were barely eight or ten passengers on board. Dr. Woods had reserved the best cabin, one on the deck for Bapu. The cabin had three berths. But Bapu had it all to himself. Compared to the earlier part of the journey the sea now was a carpet. So Bapu's journey was very comfortable, but with one exception: the constantly beeping foghorns. Closer to the coast the steamers were constantly blanketed by a thick pea soup fog and foghorns had to be blown constantly to caution other steamers close by. This was a severe impediment for a sleepless night. But after a couple of days all the passengers got used to the din and slept through it.

Dr. Woods was at the dock to receive Bapu. He was also flashing a clipping from the local newspaper. Surprisingly the news of an Indian professor being invited by Harvard to help with a Pali book had been published there. Suddenly Bapu recollected that the young wireless officer on the ship had gone out of his way to fraternize with him a couple of days before reaching the Boston port and had pried out all kinds of information about him.

Dr. Woods led him to the Harvard Union club where a room had been booked for him for four or five days. Thence he was given an awfully inconvenient room at the Warren House. Bapu just couldn't tolerate it. So he was given a nicer one at the Felton Hall. But this was

far more expensive, twenty dollars per month, sixty rupees.

More unpleasant surprises awaited Bapu in the near future. The origin of all these was that Prof. Lanman with whom he had to work was disgruntled with the appointment of this uneducated Indian. An egoist by nature, Lanman had become adversarial even before he had set eyes on Bapu. Bapu did not fail to note the animosity. However, after working with Bapu he curbed his opinion somewhat. In the beginning he had apparently even refused to pay Bapu a salary. Woods told him all this now. He was probably confident that he would overpower Lanman's objection. This also explained the awful room at the Warren House.

However, during the very first week Lanman was convinced of Bapu's usefulness and promised to pay him eight hundred dollars per annum. This sum was barely adequate. Bapu needed to send sixty rupees per month to Bala for household expenses. The hundred and fifty dollars he had spent on his passage too came out of this salary. It was difficult for him to make two ends meet. Still even under such nerveracking circumstances he managed to pull on for eight to ten months. But he made up his mind to leave Harvard as soon the editing of the *Vishuddhimarga* was completed.

He frequently told Dr. Woods about his decision. This made the latter inordinately unhappy. He wanted Bapu at Harvard. This was not fair, considering that he did not have the power to fix his salary. Still undaunted and made capricious by his love and need for Bapu, he tried hard to make him stay. But he went about this in a devious way. Instead of pressing Bapu himself he found a middleman to do it: Okakura, the chief officer of the oriental section of the Boston Museum. Bapu and he were very good friends. One of the reasons behind the burgeoning of this friendship was that Okakura was full of love and concern for all the Asians. Second one was that they were both Buddhists.

As per Dr. Wood's instructions Okakura began to lure Bapu to stay on at Harvard for a few more years. So Bapu couldn't help recounting to him the entire story of direct and indirect umbrages suffered in the past year. Deeply moved, he opined that this was Bapu's ignominy of the highest order and that he had blundered by not signing a contract before leaving India. This was but true. However, it was too late now to rectify it. Okakura opined that Bapu should get the issue of his salary sorted out once for all or go home immediately. The goodnatured man even offered to pay for Bapu's passage back home and to fix up an appointment for Bapu with the resident of Harvard.

Bapu did not accept either offer. He saw no reason to take the

matter to the president. But he informed Lanman that he would be getting back home if he was not paid a sufficient remuneration. This worked. Even though Lanman got infuriated he ultimately complied and gave Bapu a contract for two thousand dollars per annum to be paid with retrospective effect. This was a good contract. Bapu got seven or eight hundred rupees in lump sum, by way of the back payment. He deposited this amount in a bank. He would pay off the debt and the lawyer's expenses out of this windfall, he decided.

He had fixed up a very enjoyable routine for himself; have two shredded wheats and a cup of cold milk for breakfast, work in Prof. Lanman's library from half past eight to half past twelve, have one more cup of milk in the room, then do exercises and a take shower. In summer he would row a boat. In winter he visited the gym. At night he dined on a piece of fruit tart and a cup of cocoa. The evenings he spent at the Harvard Library or at home, reading. The nights were generally spent translating the difficult passages in the *Vishuddhimarga* or weeding out the interpolations in the manuscript.

On Sundays he worked in Lanman's house till half past ten or eleven, then attended a sermon in some church or in the Appleton chapel. This chapel is affiliated to the Harvard University. There is no discrimination here for the diverse sects of Christianity. Even the Jew Rabbis are invited to sermonize about their gospels. Bapu loved to listen to the famous religious preachers that were invited to this pulpit. In the evenings he attended the talks organized by various social institutions. The schedule shaped him into a socialist and a fitness devotee.

"The main topic for my reading was social sciences. I read many books on the subject and bought many too. In fact one could say that I was obsessed with this subject. I contributed some articles to *Subodhpatrika* and *Sudharak* at the time on the subject of how to improve the condition of the workers by incorporating the principles of cooperation. I constantly reflected about one point: how could the wastage of the ability of the Indian man be stopped and his natural ability be utilized for his physical and mental happiness. I knew that our country was not the area for translating thought into action, also that nor was I capable of doing it. Still my mind got exhilarated by such thoughts or rather dreams. My best pastime was to give a thought to ways of reforming the condition of the poverty-stricken people of India and of furbishing those backward guys with facilities like education etc. Even if I could devote a moment to this thought, my mental and

physical suffering got wiped off.” *Nivedan* ,chapter eighteen.

These articles didn’t get anywhere for India was not ready for socialism yet.

The happy arrangement about the salary should have helped the peaceful completion of the book. But didn’t. There was one more controversy and this finally broke the relationship of these two co-workers. It related to the matter to be printed on the cover of the new edition of the *Vishuddhimarga*. This controversy too had been hanging in the air for some time. Bapu had mentioned it to Okakura who had advised that all controversies be sorted out immediately. Still Bapu kept this one on the back burner fearing that it would infuriate Lanman beyond the point of no return and he would not strike a compromise for the salary either. But after the editing was over he made a specific query about the cover. Lanman now notified that he would mention his own name as the editor and that he would add a comment below this saying that Kosambi and Warren had helped with the editing.

“This would not be proper,” Bapu couldn’t help saying. “The work has reached this stage because of Warren’s extreme hard work and generosity. My salary too was paid out of the fund that Warren had raised. So either the book should have the names of all three of us, Warren, Lanman and Kosambi as editors or only Warren should be mentioned as the editor and credit for the variations that we had made should be recorded in the foreword.”

Prof. Lanman grossly disapproved of this suggestion. He was so inflamed that he began to badmouth Bapu. The latter resolved never to set eyes on Lanman since that day. He reported the unpleasant episode to Dr. Woods and booked a passage on a steamer of the Hamburg American company departing from New York ten or fifteen days later.

As soon as the news of his departure was known to his friends there was a rush of farewell dinners for him. He honoured them all. But refused to honour Lanman’s invitation. His feelings for the latter were absolutely shambled. Lanman sent him two or three notes. But Bapu just couldn’t bring himself to meet him. He was through with him for life.

He left for New York a few days after X-mas and boarded the steamer on the 4th of January 1912, enriched by two leading precepts that were the hallmark of American culture, socialism and fitness. He would pass on a love for both to his son.

EIGHTEEN

1912-1918

During his stay at Harvard the family had continued to live in the dreary place in Raviwar Peth. Bapu unfailingly sent sixty rupees every month and Bala managed her household within that sum fortified by gifts from her father and brothers. Manik was ten and Baba three. Both had joined the New English School. Manorama was barely one. Dada made it a point to send Mangu or a cousin as a companion for Bala. And there were always a couple of maidservants to attend to the chores. During vacations the family travelled to Chikhali. The kids loved to swim, trudge and fish in the creek, eat jackfruit and mangoes off the trees and trek the surrounding hills. They entailed no objections to the lack of plumbing in the house. Bala never forgot to carry gifts to her brothers and friends, mostly goodies. She also attended to all the summer chores there: storing chilly and turmeric powders, mixing tamarind with salt, making papads, pickling mangoes, getting cashews roasted and getting the house repaired to face the severe monsoon months. She had been the head of that household during the past six years and she continued to fulfil that role even now.

Her expertise at these chores was wellknown and often she was invited by her friends to stay with them for a few days and help them with these. She invariably returned to Pune with bags filled with parboiled rice, sundried jackfruit sections, dry fish, coconuts, papads, tamarind and all kinds of spices. These kept her going for a few months and got constantly replenished by the endless stream of house guests. These were not only local delectable foods that she and the kids, especially Manik, had formed a taste for, they were also necessities which helped her run her household within the shoestring budget.

In those days sixty rupees was not a small sum. At the same time it was not a comfortable sum either. It had to cover the children’s fees, also expenses like their clothes and doctors’ fees. The constant trips to Goa undertaken by her, the kids and the servants were a drain on her economy. Her only hope was that matters would improve after Bapu came home.

Finally he did. He was given an even more thumping reception at the dock by his friends. This time Bala was there too, with Manik..

She had left the younger two at home for they were a handful. The Madgaonkars had gladly kept mother and daughter with them as guests and Bapu too stayed there for a couple of days meeting all his friends. His arrival made news in Pune too.

The things that he had got for the kids enthralled them all: shoes, dresses, hair brushes and shredded wheat. Some of them had been gifts given by his friends. More than the gifts the stories that he had to recount about his stay were exciting. They burnt midnight oil listening to these. He was their window to an incredibly large world they had not seen yet.

The first thing Bapu did was to pay off the debt incurred from Vishnu Naik. He had already paid for the lawyer's fees. The law suit had been settled in Ramchandradada's favour and there was peace and joy at Sankhwal. After all this got done a comfortable sum of fifteen hundred rupees was left in his bank.

The Bombay University had finally included Pali in its curriculum, thanks to ceaseless efforts by Dr. Bhandarkar. Now many colleges were looking for professors who would teach this subject. Vithalaro Shinde suggested that Bapu apply to the Fergusson College, a very wellknown institution in Pune. Bapu complied.

A few days later he received a letter from Rangler Raghunath Purushottam Paranjpe, the principal of Fergusson College:

"We are willing to have you at the Fergusson College as professor of Pali. The post will be permanent. The salary given to the life members of the Deccan Education Society is rupees hundred per month. However we could pay you only seventy five rupees per month. You have to sign a bond for five years."

The letter really hit a raw nerve.

"We always look upon the Fergusson College as an excellent example of a spirit of sacrifice. We were quick to applaud accounts of the sacrifices made by renowned social workers like Agarkar, Gokhale, Paranjpe, Karve etc. But the above letter flustered me. I didn't have a degree like M.A. or even B.A. So it was appropriate that I couldn't be made a life member of the Society. The condition to work for a minimum of five years was right too. But I failed to understand the words that while they drew a salary of hundred rupees per month I would be given only seventyfive rupees. Even though I do not have degrees I do have a family like the other professors, don't I? The salary given to the professors should be intended to take care of their families. It should not be a glorificatory gesture.... We lived in a constricted place in

Raviwar Peth. The rent was six rupees per month. After having experienced modern life style in America it was but natural to be dissatisfied with this place. Expenses for the kids' education were getting higher and higher. So one had to find out first whether one could live within this salary... However I calculated that if I dipped into my savings at a rate of twentyfive rupees per month my saving would last me for five years. Hence I accepted the job not bothering about anxieties." *Khulasa*, chapter four.

He did not have to give in so easily. There was indeed a shortage of professors for Pali and his was a most unusual case. He was the man who discovered Pali for India. He had made headlines. He could have easily found another job or would have got a better deal if he had argued his case. But in the conflict of high principles with concern for family the former had always won and they did so now. He opted to work and live within this pittance of a salary.

This time Dada did not even bother to find out how much salary Bapu would be getting. Over the years he too had come to have a viewpoint that matched Bala's: is the home intact? Has Bapu signed a contract whereby he is going to stay at Pune for five years? Then everything was fine. No more questions, no more nagging. Both Kashbha and Pachubai had become very weak. They were almost bedridden. Dada visited them three or four times a week in his car. This took a toll of his free time leaving him with very little time to dwell on other anxieties. He was also besotted by grave anxieties about Martul.

Martul was seven, goodlooking and exceedingly sweet by nature. However, she was a failure at learning the three Rs. Dada desired to send her to a Portuguese school. But she was very slow at learning. Another worrying factor for Dada was her absolute compliance to tradition, especially the rules for eating and touching. She had innumerable friends nearby, friends from all castes and communities. But no one ever visited her. They all played outside. If ever she visited her Brahmin friends their mothers served her food in a corner over a leaf plate and she had to throw this away on the garbage heap and swab the place after she was done. Martul saw nothing wrong in the custom.

When Dada found this out he began breathe fire:

"Magha! Why are people insulting her in this way? Why should she comply? Isn't she my daughter? Stop her from going to them," he yelled.

"How can I? She will have no friends left if I did. She is your daughter. But she is my daughter too. People cannot forget this. Such

is the custom. We cannot blame them for sticking to it," Magha answered. She was inordinately happy about being wrested out of the impending doom of the oldest profession of the world. She was not a reformer. She did not want to demolish the present structure of the society and rebuild it to Dada's satisfaction and convenience. She did not resent the rules of untouchability. On the contrary she could see that if Martul defied them she would get pushed into an insular world.

Dada stopped arguing with her. May be she had made Martul the docile and acquiescent child that she was, he reflected. He tried to knock some home truths in Martul's mind.:

"Martul! For Heavens' sake don't eat off a leaf plate placed in a corner. If at all they want to serve you food let them do so next to them in a brass *thali*. Tell them how pampered you are at home. Tell them you eat off a china plate and at the dining table," he fumed.

Martul nodded vaguely, smiled and fled. He doubted if at all she had the intention of following his instructions. He just gave up. This was the first time he had given up on anything.

Magha often took Martul with her to Chikhali. Bala, Mangu, Bappa, Kakibai, everyone had a lot of love for her. But they had never invited her to sit by their side while they had their meals. Food got sent to the first floor where Dada invariably ensconced himself ever since it had been completed. And they ate it there. But once Martul happened to be in the Middle Room while the ladies in the house were serving food to themselves. She could roam about the house at will, there were no taboos here.

"Martul, are you hungry? Would you like to eat?" Kakibai asked. Indeed she bit her tongue as soon as the question had slipped out of her mouth for now she was in a quandary; if she served her food by their side Bala and others might protest, if she didn't Dada might be furious. However Martul solved the problem. She nodded vigorously, then sprinted to the store room and came back with a leaf plate which she placed in a corner. Tremendous relief for everyone!

No one could remember having trained her in these dictates of caste distinction. She had just picked them up herself through sheer observance. The point was, she was a very good adherent.

Before joining the Fergusson college Bapu visited Dr. Bhandarkar at Indore. He had been staying with his son for some time. The scholar was stunned to hear that Bapu had agreed to a salary of seventy five rupees.

"How can you support your family within this salary? You won't

enjoy living in that small flat. You have three kids now. Have you given a thought to the needs of your family?" he asked irately. Bapu's lack of commonsense unfailingly inflamed him.

"What is wrong in making this much sacrifice for the Deccan Education Society? I am happy I accepted the post," was Bapu's stock answer. Bhandarkar dropped a curtain on the argument. He was fully familiar with Bapu's obduracy. He gave him his blessings 'for his intended achievements' and hoped it was a worthwhile wish.

One more person angered by this decision was Sayajirao.

"Shouldn't you have had a meeting with me before accepting these terms? You worked for Harvard and now you are selling your services for this pittance? This is the price you fix of yourself?" he rasped. Bapu had not gone to meet him at Baroda. He happened to visit Mumbai and Bapu had gone to see him there.

"Sorry for that. I should have looked you up. But I don't think my present job is a mistake. If the price of a man is the salary that he draws, Gokhale and Agarkar would be priced at near zero. I think my price will be fixed by an evaluation of my work. Supposing I fail in achieving anything at least I would not be blamed for having manipulated an astronomical salary," Bapu answered. He also requested that the Baroda government give a few scholarships to students of Pali. Sayajirao complied. During Bapu's stint at the Fergusson College the Baroda government gave two monthly scholarships of fifteen rupees each and two of ten rupees each to students who had opted for Pali.

Bapu stuck to the contract. For more than five years he entertained no thought of leaving the Fergusson College. He also started free Pali classes at the New English School for younger students. Chintamani Rajwade, Parshuram Laxman Vaidya, Chintamani Vinayak Joshi, Purushottam Vishwanath Bapat, Narayan Keshav Bhagwat were some of his more wellknown M.A. students. C.V. Joshi got a job at Baroda, he also became famous as a writer of humour. P.V. Bapat got a job at the Fergusson College. Later on Bapu recommended him for some translations in which Harvard University was interested. Bapat spent three years there. During this time he learnt Chinese and even got a doctorate in that language. Back in India he helped to translate many Chinese books into English. Some of Bapu's students were as extraordinary as himself.

Life for the Kosambis during this period was not a bed of roses. Bapu himself found it very difficult to make the two ends meet. But stuck it out by sheer dint of the reclusive philosophy he was imbibed

in. Conditions were made worse by Bala's fourth pregnancy. She lost weight and took to bed. Mangu rushed down to Pune with a distant aunt who began to cook and handle other chores. But this only added to Bapu's financial burden.

He had been regularly corresponding with Dr. Woods. Prof. Lanman had not been able to complete the editing of the *Vishuddhimarga*. The work had lagged behind simply because of Lanman's presumptuousness. Bapu was upset, but was helpless to do anything about it. But in 1918 Dr. Woods wrote to inform him that Lanman had changed, that he would love to have Bapu back at Harvard. Would he be interested in completing it? he queried. Bapu wrote back immediately to say that that wish was closest to his heart.

"Mangu! Bapu has got an offer from Harvard. He is tempted," Bala vented her fear in a tremulous voice.

"It is an honour."

"I know. At the same time I am in no position to look after four kids singlehandedly."

"But you always do. I mean Bapu is never here to look after the family. He travels, he visits other universities and friends."

"That is different. These are but short visits. If he goes to Harvard he might stay there for a few years."

"He might ask for better terms this time. He is fed up of scrimping all the time. He will send you a lot of money."

"And should that satisfy me? Am I a kept woman? Who will face the responsibilities of the kids?"

"I agree wholeheartedly with you. But who is going to get Bapu to comply? Anyway now it will be very difficult to find someone who can stop him from going. The world sides with him. They want him to win greater honour. They will scoff at you for trying to tie him to your apron strings. The time to achieve this is long past."

"I could never achieve it. I never had that kind of influence over him. I have friends whose husbands hum round them like bees. Fate did not intend such happiness for me. The apex of my happiness is that Bapu should send me enough money for housekeeping expenses!" She had become angry and when she flared up she used strong language. Right now, weakened by her pregnancy, she had struck the rock bottom of despondency. But in no way could she be wrested out of the abyss. For honour as well as for money Bapu needed to go to Harvard and the world supported him, exactly as it had done during his monkhood!

Manik had finished first year in college. Baba was about to clear

the third standard and Manu the first. Bapu was toying with the idea of taking Manik with him and getting her admitted to Radcliff. He was absolutely taken up by the idea of giving an American education to one of his children to start with. This further crushed Bala. She very easily got into the role of her mother's confidante. She was a tremendous help at cooking and other chores of housekeeping and also at looking after the younger two siblings. She was the only child to understand her mother's trauma. Whenever Bala was harassed by their tight monetary position Manik would console her:

"But he is so great Aai! People heroworship him as a great man. We are really lucky to have a celebrity for a father, Very few kids share this honour with us."

"You are absolutely right. But I would have been happier if along with the honour you could have had a few nice saris."

"Such is not Bapu's nature, Aai! He doesn't buy dhotis for himself till they are threadbare and almost falling apart. Had he lived in luxury and neglected us we could have blamed him. But he doesn't."

"I don't blame him, only my fate. I feel sorry for you all."

"We are happy. We don't yearn for anything!"

"That is because your uncles help generously. How long should they do this? They seem to have been saddled with my burden forever. I feel very sad that I cannot return their favour in anyway. It is time he gave a thought to your marriage too."

"There is still time for that, Aai! Nobody is getting married before completing their education," Manik commented. The few girls in her class at the Fergusson College were all daughters of avant-gardes and reformers. But there was a very large world beyond the college and girls were getting married there at fifteen and sixteen. In Goa they got married still earlier, almost after they came of age.

Manik had received quite a few proposals from Goan families. But Bapu was dead against early marriages and absolutely keen on her graduation. He wouldn't hear of her marriage. Nor would she. Lying on her bed, her mind riven with a myriad gloomy thoughts, Bala wondered if some day Bapu would be upto tackling the intricacies of arranging a daughter's marriage. The answer unfailingly was in the negative. He had absolutely no flair for such personal and mundane achievements.

The Lauds did not want to interfere in any matter in which Bapu had a say. They did not want to burn their fingers with yet one more imbroglio with Bapu. Ramchandradada was too jaded to take up the

matter. Anyway for them Bapu was God; they would not go against his wishes, ever. That left Bala alone in the arena. She could have effected Manik's engagement to a boy from a nice family. But she was not upto taking an initiative, may be because the travesty of her own life had derailed her confidence in finding a family that would keep Manik in comfort and happiness.

The school closed down in April. Mangu took Bala and the three kids to Chikhali. By now a contract had been received by Bapu. He had also got Manik's passport ready. Now that they were definitely going to lose him the trustees of the Deccan Education Society offered him a salary of hundred rupees, at par with that of the others. This was exactly how the authorities at the Calcutta University had acted too; but the salary offered by them had been two hundred and fifty rupees. However Bapu was past falling for such temptations.

One more obstacle beset his plans; Baba kept falling sick, he was very weak. Bala hoped this would melt Bapu's heart and he would stay at Pune at least for the time being.

"I am not going to be sick forever. Manik can handle the cooking in my absence. Even Manu can cook gruel and a few other simple things. Manik can look after Baba too," she began to say hopefully, but invariably to herself, Manik and her brothers. She had no courage to suggest this to Bapu. Bapu was not with her anyway.

She should have known that these were but fond hopes, that once Bapu's mind was made up his decision was cast in concrete. Nothing was going to change it. Bapu sorted the problem in his own way; he would take Baba with him; Manu would be put in the Huzurpaga hostel at Pune, a girls' school, and the establishment at Pune would be closed for the time being.

Bala's children would be taken away from her and once again she would become homeless and dependent. Story of her life!

NINETEEN

May – October 1918

Once again the small multipurpose room in Kashba's house had become a scene of hectic activity. Actually it was no more Kashba's house, but the Laud brother's house, Kashba having passed away a month back. It was a scorching afternoon in the month of May, trees and palms absolutely flutterless. The sky an upturned bowl, iridescent white, air suffocating with dust and vapours. As soon as the wail of a baby resonated round the room Savitri darted out:

"It is a girl." She reported. The news was received only by the women, the men were out and they were bereft of enthusiasm.

"Girl! One more girl. Bala now has three girls and only one son," they began to whisper.

Bala herself was in the clutches of a worse melancholy by the birth of this girl. Under the present circumstances due to Bapu's lack of involvement in a well organized and comfortable life for the kids, the girl was plainly an additional burden. Also by now Bala had thoroughly lost her faith in the meaningfulness of a girl's life. Overdependency and uncertainty left no chance for a girl to get anywhere, she felt. The fourth pregnancy had taken a toll on her excellent health. She was reduced to a skeleton, pale like a newly washed sheet. She was through with pregnancies forever.

A horrendous conclusion began to nag at Bala's mind as she lay supine on the corded cot: every time they had a child Bapu was gripped by a vicelike desire to get away from home and family. He had left her for six years after Manik was born. Around Baba's birth he had stayed at the Mahabodhi Sabha for more than a year. When Manu arrived he had taken off to Harvard for two years. What next? The answers furbished by her mind were petrifying. Bapu could live at Harvard for years and this time she would be separated from her two children too. After six years of stable and independent life the thought of being a single mother living off her brothers was excruciating.

"Bala! Don't sulk! You already have two girls. Now you have three, that's all," Savitri said, entering the room with a brass bowl of steaming hot gruel.

"I am not hungry. Actually I am not thinking of this girl. I am wondering when I will set eyes on Manik and Baba."

"They should be here next year," Savitri made a random guess intended to be more consolatory than factual.

"I don't think so. Every time a child is born Bapu takes off."

"But he always comes back."

"Some day he would come back to set fire to my pyre. Would that help?"

"Now don't you utter malevolent words. Have some gruel and sleep. You are weak and tired," Savitri said, forcing Bala to have a few spoonfuls. Her son Antulya had been renamed Motha Baba now to distinguish him from Bala's Baba. A little older than Manik, he was at Mumbai for his college education.

The newborn girl was fair with lush dark hair, a beautiful child, but smaller than the others, almost scrawny. Narshabhat dropped in after she was two days old. Gut instinct told him that Bala was bound to be disgruntled by the birth of a girl and he had chosen to wait till the first impact of the shock eased somewhat. Bala welcomed him. She had been wondering what kind of stars the new baby had been born under.

"This girl too has a very good future. She will be very clever. She will get a very good education," the priest predicted. By now he knew what line to pull in order to please Bala. But for once Bala cut him short:

"Narsha! I don't want to know what is going to happen to her. Tell me how she is going to affect my life."

"Sorry. Somehow I didn't give this a thought." Narshabhat took a crumpled paper out of his pocket, the child's horoscope.

"Bapu is going to America and this time he is taking two kids with him. I want him to come back as soon as possible," Bala continued, lost in her own grief.

"My god! That is bad news indeed!" There! The priest had found his new line. He peered a bit at the paper in his hand and scowled "What happened?" Bala was berserk.

"Terrible! What awful stars! Thanks for reminding me to check them. Somehow I had forgotten."

"Don't blabber, Narsha! Give me the poison fast. Will Bapu come back? Will he want to set up home again? He is winding up the present one."

"I don't know. The child obviously is giving wrong thoughts to

the father?"

"How wrong? Will he become a monk again?" Bala's persistent fear!

"Who can tell?"

"Hurry then, find a good tantrik."

"I will. But I can't promise results. Nothing has worked much in the past."

"I know. Then what?"

"Feed her the paste of *nachani*. I will also look for a good tantrik."

"Do that." Bala gave him a five rupee note. She felt as if her heart was being slowly squeezed by an invisible icy hand.

"Mangu! Narshabhat has predicted that the birth of this girl forebodes sinister events in our marital life. We cannot question his insight into the future for the signs are very clear. As long as she lives the marriage will be on rocks." Bala held a consultation with Mangu and subsequently with Bappa and Jagu too. They decided to save the marriage by following the priest's advice.

Feeding the paste of *nachani* was the traditional measure to get rid of an unwanted child, mostly girls. The high percentage of roughage contained in *nachani* makes it nearly indigestible for infants and highly dangerous. Yet it is not a killer grain. Only the fragile might die. It is not impossible to survive. It was a remedy discovered by the local poor to get rid of an unwanted child without a prick of conscience. Now the Lauds took recourse to it. As it happened Bala did not have any milk to give to the girl. They gave her cow's milk along with the paste.

However, the child survived. She lived happily on a staple diet of *nachani* paste. Of all the Kosambi children she had the longest life, more than ninety years.

A few days before the end of the summer vacation Bapu arrived at Chikhali to see the latest addition to his family. He was livid to find that his infant daughter was being fed this supposedly fatal *nachani* paste. Almost for the first time in known history he lost his temper. He fought with all the Laud brothers. For once Dada sided with him; he had been kept in the dark by his siblings.

"Bala! Are you crazy? Stop the nonsense, I tell you," they both yelled.

"Name her Kamla for Laxmi. She is going to have a great life." Bapu enjoined. However he didn't strive to give her one. He obviously considered this as beside the point.

Bala swore that never again would she feed the child this dangerous food. But her faith in the power of the tantrik remained intact. She continued to believe that others had been luckier than her in finding godmen possessed of foolproof means to change anyone's future. She was convinced that Bapu's illwishers had been lucky enough to find them, but not her. Bapu didn't know it, but he always played into their hands, the godman arranged it.

Nor did her conviction that her fate had been changed for worse by the advent of her youngest daughter ever change. Bala was fiercely attached to Manik, her first born, in whom she had confided her traumas ever since the child was a month old. She was equally fiercely attached to Baba because he was her son, the only one, her traditional provider in her old age. For Manu she had a certain tolerance because she had arrived long time before her recent trauma was stimulated. In fact Manu had proved herself to be of use in crises. Often when Bala took to bed from weakness, Manu managed to cook rice gruel on the wood chullah. This helped Bala regain her strength for she loved gruel and had deep faith in its invigorating qualities. Manu however, was through with gruel for life.

The Lauds were embarrassed by Bapu's anger. They promised never to do this again and promptly put the child on a diet of cow's milk alone.

Bapu returned a few days later and took Manik and Baba with him. Bala was too weak to go and anyway, what was the point? They were to go directly to Mumbai by steamer and start for Richmond, California in a couple of days. The First World War had just ended. Nevertheless the Mumbai- Liverpool route was not fully operational yet. They would go via Singapore and a few other ports in Japan and take more than three months to reach the coast of America.

Bala howled like an animal when the time to bid adieu came. She held Baba in a tight embrace and refused to let him go. Bapu pushed her away and carried him to the waiting taxi. Bala followed crying miserably. Everybody began to cry, even the women in the house and the Kathkaris.

"Why do you cry, Bala? Is something bad happening? Do you know the value of an American education? What fate could be brighter than this? You should be elated that I can afford this good fortune for my kids," Bapu chided. For him it was a great achievement, an American schooling for the children of a man who had had none himself. His perspective at that point was pretty narrow, focused on education and

nothing else. The fear that this sudden and jolting separation from the family, the mother especially, would have some ruthless effect on Baba's young mind, that he too might get focused on education, achievement and scholarship and fail to learn to give and take love at all the times, had never touched his mind.

Bapu enrolled Baba at the Ringe Technical School and Manik at Radcliff with Psychology as a major. He was extremely impressed by these technical schools which were the speciality of America. In India nothing of the sort had been started yet. However this was apparently a wrong choice. Dr. Woods kept a close watch on the kids' future and was quick to point this out frankly to him:

"Kosambi! This is not the right school for Baba. It is intended for skilled workers like carpenters, plumbers, smiths etc.. He would not be upto the level of hard menial work expected. And the child is not cut out for such a profession either. He is a booklover. He has extraordinary intellectual powers. Get him into the Harvard Grammar School. After he completes school he could go for technical education or for engineering."

Apparently Bapu was still not persuaded. But Woods was insistent to the point of giving an order.

"I had no choice but to follow Woods' advice," Bapu wrote in *Nivedan*.

Due to Woods' timely intervention and very accurate analysis of Baba's mental assets the world was awarded a phenomenal scholar. The boy had not only inherited Bapu's flair for absorbing knowledge, he was also willing to face all kinds of hardships for its attainment, though in a different way. He took up many extra subjects and reached the apex of research in many:

Mathematics, physics, languages, numismatics, archeology and many more. He would also undertake all kinds of tough jobs in order to add to the small pocket money that Bapu could afford to give him.

However, at that point Baba himself rebelled against the idea of leaving the Ringe School and joining the Harvard Grammar School. He had taken roots in the Ringe after considerable mental wear and tear and he just didn't want to be uprooted a second time or, if one counts the arduous journey by steamer and train, a third one.

"I am happy in my present school. I do not want to change it," he spoke out. His voice was level, but the tone was uncannily firm for an eleven year old child.

"You have to. It is for your own good." Both the guardians were

relentless in their decision.

"Shouldn't you have given it a thought in the first place and put me in the right school?"

"It is always the right time to rectify an error."

Baba had to give in after a while. But he did fight till he was completely exhausted.

"Baba! Why do you fight? Their concern is only for a fine future for you," Manik reasoned with him.

"And making an absolute mess of it."

"No. You will be better off here and you know it."

"I still have to exert my right to fight." Baba had apparently inherited Bapu's stubbornness. He resented being dictated to. The constant sparring with his father would infuse a love for warring into Baba's heart. His tolerance level would be no thicker than the thinnest of membranes. But he would war till the end, go in for the final kill. Unlike Bapu he would not tire of combating half way and give up.

TWENTY

October 1918 – August 1922

This time Bapu stayed at Harvard for four years, till Manik graduated from Radcliff with Psychology as her major. Bala was driven up the walls. This was really when she got closest to being unhinged. His absence did more damage to her now than the six years' separation following Manik's birth. She was shattered at that time too, but at least her hopes were alive. Now she had no hope that he was ever going to change; she could see that a pattern had set in and that was going to be her life forever, a few years together alternating with years of long absences. As ever her stay at Chikhali was as comfortable as it could be. In fact they needed her there to run that household and appreciated her services. But their need and support of her was grossly inadequate to pull her out of her anguish.

The six members of her family had come to live in five different places; Bapu at Harvard, Manik at Radcliff, Baba at the dormitory of the Harvard Grammar School, Manu at Huzurpaga, Pune, and Bala and Kamlu at Chikhali. Even though Bala and Kamlu lived in the same house Bala was not involved with her upbringing. The girl was looked after by Kakibai who still had no child of her own. Except for Bapu and Manik who enjoyed their stay on the foreign land the other four were crushed with loneliness and the trauma of adjustment to different life. To make matters worse Bapu did not send any money this time to Bala. He probably figured that she didn't need to have money since she was not encumbered by housekeeping expenses. He sent a little bit every now and then which was barely adequate for Manu's schooling. Wasn't the whole point in going to Harvard was to afford a good education and other commodities for the kids? Bala constantly asked herself, getting angrier and angrier. At thirty five and as a wife of a celebrity Bala hated to ask her brother for money.

Bapu earned well. But the expenses for the education of Baba and Manik were very high too. Baba did not have to pay any fee. He even got textbooks and a regular medical checkup free. But the charges for the dormitory were exorbitant. Also, Bapu had borrowed money for the passages to America from Balwantrao Madgaonkar and Girijashankar Trivedi. He was saving to pay this back. Till the day he left Mumbai,

the money for the passages had not arrived due to the arduous and time-consuming conditions after the war. No deadline was set on Bapu's arrival at Harvard. But since he did not want to miss the school and college terms he had decided to depart without waiting for the promised advance from Dr. Woods. He had received the money by then, but hadn't paid off the debt. He would do that after he returned.

Bala, who was not aware of all these details, was needled by the thought of this unpaid debt. She was not sure if she would ever see the colour of his money or would be destined to a lifelong banishment to Chikhali for financial reasons. By this time the agricultural income of the Lauds had dwindled considerably. The lands they had bought at Phonda and other places had been given on lease for a fixed sum. Slowly the leaseholders had stopped being good and regular paymasters. They offered many excuses like sickness and expenses for marriages, etc. Moreover, they cheated on the yield. Mangu and Jagu had to visit their fields every day. Year after year the outstanding was getting piled up. The two doctors had put in all their savings in these fields, but were now finding themselves out of any income whatsoever from these investments.

For the orchards and the fields it was another story, but one with the same end result, a severe cash crunch. The system of bonded labour had gone absolutely haywire. It had turned around and was now sucking the masters instead of the victims or may be both. The population of these poor helpers who lived in the huts had grown out of proportion leading to horrendous squalour and starvation. Their begging was endless. There were constant thefts too. Fruits from the trees would disappear overnight. Sacks of rice would vaporise. The Lauds didn't know where the stuff had gone or who had taken it. Quite a few of the younger generation refused to work in the masters' fields. They found paid work elsewhere or they went to Mumbai and had jobs there. They expected to be paid all the while, asking ceaselessly for favours and exerting their right to be looked after in every way. The number of the Lauds' cattle had dwindled, some had died, some had just walked away and got lost, had been probably stolen. They had to pay to get their roof fixed. They to implore their bonded men and women to work. They got heavily traumatized in the days before the monsoon wondering how they were to cope with the tilling, sowing and cutting of the crop. It was a crazy situation for them all. Bala did not want to add to their burden. Nor were they in a position to give her small gifts of money every now and then as they had done earlier.

Nature too was not as bountiful as before. Everybody had noted it even though at that point they had no concept of Nature's pillage by man. In summer the gardens around their house needed to be watered very regularly. Since no one was available to do this trees and plants frequently died. The lush green grass, the fruits and berries were no more. The starving urchins of the Kathkaris ate them up before they were ripe. The creek still swilled over with fish. But there was no one to catch it. At times they had to buy it.

Development too had passed the small village by. The government had started schools in other villages or built better roads. Bazaars and shops had come up. But somehow Chikhali had remained aloof from all these advances. Except for Antony's taxi service there were no other business. Bountiful Nature had been their only means of livelihood and now She too was failing them.

On top of this Dada had his own personal trauma to face: Martul was nearly fourteen. She had left school long time back, but was good in embroidering and cooking. She had blossomed into a beautiful but traditional girl. She wore nine yard saris whereas Magha wore five yard ones. She tied her hair in a glossy chignon, never plaited it like the more fashionable girls. And ofcourse she never failed to eat in a corner in the high caste households.

Dada was exasperated. But had given up trying to force her into an avant-garde mould. Now his anxiety was for her marriage. A horrendous reality had suddenly dawned on him.; in the existing caste structure he would fail to ever find a suitable boy for her. Magha, her mother had been out of the structure completely. No castes would like to have Martul in their house. Girls of her age were getting married. But all efforts to find a boy for Martul had failed.

"Find me a good boy for her. I don't care how much dowry I have to give. I will give a house, a car, a shop, everything," Dada entreated everyone. But no one complied. Nobody wanted to put their hand in a snake pit and invite a social disaster upon themselves.

Kashba's large and beautiful house, which had been a heaven, had suddenly turned into a decrepit, scary one, their luxurious life style reduced to scrimping and worrying. They were all obsessed with the problem of repairing and running it. Bala crumbled disastrously. She was still the behemoth, she still counted papads, locked up the rice sacks and sent urchins to bring home missing cattle. But nothing worked. Nothing extricated them from the onset of cringing circumstances. For the first time Bala found herself as ineffectual at her brothers' place as

in her own home at Sankhwal. She took to escapism, visiting relatives and friends at Belgaum, Pune and Mumbai, thus blowing away illaffordable money. But she made up for this squandermania by finding money for them all from Bapu's friends: the Bhandarkars and Madgaonkars and others. As the days passed by she got wary of dropping broad hints and took to asking for money pointblank.

"Can you advance me some money? I haven't received any for a while from Harvard," she said avoiding promises of a repayment. The repayment of the money would be a private matter between her husband and his friends. Her perspective was that they had encouraged him to go to Harvard, they had propelled him to all these new horizons that took him away from his family. So was it not upto them to see that she got enough money to look after herself and the kids?

The friends helped generously and without rancour. The money helped to some extent in barricading them against dire poverty and keeping them all in a tight middle class existence. But it also fostered Bala's bitterness and fears. She hated herself for having to do it and she also hated the friends who helped. To her they were the real culprits, people who had not given Bapu the right advice. The money that they gave her was some kind of punishment for their culpability. Bala never appreciated it as help or entertained the desire to return it. She nursed the grouse till her last day on earth!

She often broke down and vented these feelings whenever she was alone with Mangu.

"I am the real Buddhist, Mangu! I am the one who is begging for my kids. Kosambi's begging never stopped. He just passed it on to me."

People did not mind helping her. But they sensed her adversary attitude and that hurt. They resented it. They did not expect an exhibition of gratitude but at the same time they were taken aback by her disdainful attitude. They paid for Bapu, not for her. To them she was the shrewish wife of an outstanding man. Bala was quick to read their thoughts and disliked them all the more.

"People hate me because I ask them for money. I know. I can sense their scorn. Bapu's begging was good! Mine is rotten! He begged for his education and for a social purpose! I am a narrow-minded, selfish person! I am begging for myself and the kids! If I too wrote off my life to society and the country what would the kids do?" She said furiously, though never in Bapu's presence.

"And he begged only one meal per day. Nothing more." Mangu

too was in a state of shock due to their changed circumstances.

"He flipped over for the Buddha's gospels. I can't do it. I cannot leave my children and become a nun!" She was not inured to the ferment of expectations and aspirations that had categorized the twentieth century. There were jobs and opportunities galore. Improving one's prospects, making progress, bettering one's life style and leaving a better state of affairs to one's children were the hot topics of the day. Even uneducated housewives spoke about these when they met at temples or women's functions. Bala, always a mighty protective and concerned wife and mother, had been quick to absorb all these new ideas. So it made her doubly sorry to note that Bapu had no intention of absorbing and acting on them. He had the required education. He had the right contacts. He had arrived. He had made headlines. He should make use of the new philosophy of the century and lunge for an upward success graph that would be financially very lucrative and help his children. The problem was in getting him to cash in on his contacts, in goading him to open his mouth and say that he wouldn't work for less than this much. This had become an unachievable task since he had failed to be touched by this ferment. He lived in the world of the Buddha and other ideologies. In no way could she shake him out of this ideology. He was a staunch adherent to ideals of self-sacrifice and social purpose and a communal life, ideals which were proving to be obsolete in the changing materialistic society.

Whenever he began to think of a new future for himself his starting point invariably was: am I moving away from my fixed goal? Am I being useful to the country and society? Am I acting against the ideology? His family always came last and Bala probably was on the bottom rung of the ladder. She was a mother first and foremost, and wanted to change these priorities, to get herself and the children on top of the pyramid. But failed miserably! Other wives did not have to do this, at least not those whose husbands were educated, faithful and free of addictions. It was a maddening situation for her and her brothers too.

"Hopefully this time he will change. The American society is known to be materialistic. It might knock some home truths in his mind," Dada muttered whenever he found time to ruminate on Bala's problems. But Bapu didn't. He was firm like a rock on the point of this basic philosophy. He lived for it. And so their marriage continued to be one between the ideology of self-sacrifice and renunciation and crass materialism and practicabilities. Whether Bala and Bapu were together or separated by vast distances the marriage was always in

shambles.

Bapu had hoped that this time the longdrawn editing of the *Vishuddhimarga* would be completed. But he ran into the same difficulties. Prof Lanman proved to be as obdurate as ever and the snail's pace of the project did not change. However, by now many young Americans had developed a keen interest in Pali. Bapu was happy to have them for students. He also edited a few other Pali books.

Four years flew past on wings for Bapu. Manik and Baba, while for Manu, confined to the hostel, and Bala circling in an aimless routineless, loveless stultifying existence, time seemed to drag like a shackled slave. Manik secured a brilliant B.A. Baba got into the seventh standard. He was known to be an extraordinary student. It was time for Bapu to get back home. He left some money for Baba, twenty dollars per month (roughly sixty rupees) and three hundred and fifty dollars for his passage back home after he got through school and cleared the entrance examination required to win a scholarship for making it to the university. This was still four years away.

Baba was no more the sickling that had joined the third standard four years back. He was growing into a strapping young man, tall, handsome and lean. He played games. He went camping with his classmates. He loved to travel. His project for the entrance was going to be a subject from ballistics. This was an expensive project considering that he had to fire bullets from guns and study their trajectories. Bapu gave as much as he could. Baba, too proud to ask for more, supplemented this by undertaking jobs on farms during the summer vacation. Exposure to the American lifestyle had given him a desire to pursue many more activities. He fulfilled them by taking up one of those strenuous jobs going round for students in summer. Tirelessly he lugged heavy buckets of milk, dug yards, raked, picked fruit and lifted heavy bags of grain. The heavy work gave him cramps in his back and shoulders at night. But he had to stick it out. Unwittingly Bapu had furnished his son with a hoard of unfulfilled desires without having the means to afford or even to understand them. Bapu with his accent on simple living could not see why a boy should want to hunt, ski or drive a car.

While America was the right place for the development of the boy's extraordinary brilliance he had been finding it very hard to take deep roots in the American life style. He still missed his mother and home country. In the absence of a mother figure in his life he had come to build up a similar relationship with Manik who was twenty three

now, eight years senior to him. He crumbled hollow. But stubborn, strongwilled and extremely proud that he was he quickly filled it up with a packed schedule devoted to studies and research.

Bala and Mangu had come to receive Bapu and Manik at the dock. They were stunned to note the change in Bapu. He had aged considerably. At his first visit to Harvard he had gone in for the cleanshaven look. But since then he had taken to keeping a beard. It was white like a sheet now. His hair had thinned and the wiry look was gone. But the robust set of teeth was intact and so was the warm smile. He had embarked on the steamer wearing a suit. But now he came down the stairs wearing a khaddar dhoti, shirt, topi, chappals and shawl. He had become a diabetic and that had taken a toll on his health.

Manik could have easily passed for an American girl. The strong winters had given her a pink glow. She had not cut her hair short. But it was frizzy and could be left loose on her pretty shoulders. She had taken to wearing skirts and blouses. But she started wearing nine yard saris as soon as she was home.

"She has to get married now. But now finding a boy has become even more difficult," Bala whispered to Bapu as soon as they got a private moment to themselves. His main concern right now was to find a job for himself. This time he had no savings, he had left it all at Harvard for Baba.

While at Lahore, Anna had met Tukojirao Holkar, Prince of Indore. The latter had invited him to join his repertoire of officers as Director, Education and specifically to build up institutions for women's education, neglected field so far at Indore. Tukojirao had founded a school, Chandravati Mahila Vidyalaya, and an attached hostel, Ahilyashrama. Both the institutions were staffed by women. Anna lived on the premises with Mary and daughter Shanta. As soon as he got the news of Bapu's arrival he dashed down to Mumbai to meet him. He had a job for Manik if he wanted one, that of a superintendent for Ahilyashrama.

Manik was not interested in a job. She just wanted to take it easy for a while at Chikhali or wherever. The job offered by Anna had no appeal for her. She was too highly qualified for it. Her job would be to look after the girls who lived in the hostel. She could summon no enthusiasm for it. But Bapu was all for it and so was Anna. That job would take care of all the family problems at least for the time being. The salary of two hundred rupees would take care of all the family

problems at least for the time being. The salary of two hundred rupees would be quite adequate for the family. Manik would get quarters for herself, two rooms and a kitchenette, Bala could move in with her and Manu and Kamlu could go to the school there. That job gave Bapu all the freedom he wanted for his travels and writing. It ideally took the pressure of the family off his mind. Together he and Anna imposed upon Manik to accept it.

"Now that you have had such a fine education you cannot live in idleness. You have to make use of your qualifications, you know," they said.

"Why not? At least a few days of idleness? I toiled so hard for my exams! I majored in psychology. This job has nothing to do with academics," Manik protested.

"You may look for something more worthwhile later on. It is a good job for the time being. There are no hassles. The campus is beautiful."

Manik gave in.

Bala did not offer an opinion. She was happy to be on her own and not be a burden on her brothers. Mentally she accepted the reality that Bapu would never give her a home in the traditional sense of the word. He didn't want to be tied down to one. She would have to be satisfied with the present arrangements.

"Had you been a boy I would have stayed with you and used your salary. You are not one, but like one. Bapu brought you up as one. So it is probably right that you provide me a home till you are married," she said to Manik.

"I love to have you with me, Aai! It is the job that I am not happy about," Manik answered.

Bala didn't think it wise to disturb Kamlu at that juncture. She was barely four years old and exceedingly attached to Kakibai. She went to school, that small tin structure Manik had attended, along with other children. She was doing very well there. She was a pampered and headstrong child. Bala didn't think she could handle her.

Before Bapu escorted his family to Indore he went Pune to pick up Manu and meet his friends. As usual Dr. Bhandarkar was quite displeased when Bapu informed him of these arrangements.

"Is it right that you are saddling Manik with your responsibilities? Shouldn't she lead a life of her own? Get married?" He asked not bothering to conceal his anger.

"I do intend to find a suitable boy for her. But let her be useful

to the country for a while," Bapu answered nonchalantly.

Bhandarkar wanted to take him to task. But bridled himself. Past experience told him that nothing was going to change Bapu's decisions.

"If you say so. But there is another matter. You have to have your own house sooner or later."

"I will do that after I save some money."

"How will you save money if you do not handle your life well?" Bhandarkar wanted to ask. But once again he swallowed his words.

"You start building. You fix it as your target and the money will come. The plot of my house is very big. I will give you a chunk at its end. Pay me whenever you find the money."

"I don't even have a job," Bapu complained mildly.

"You will, sooner or later."

The Lauds kept a pokerface when the news was reported to them. They didn't believe that Bapu was ever going to build a house. Nor did Bala.

TWENTY ONE

November 1922-1924

Soon Bapu found a job, a very good one at a monthly salary of three hundred and fifty rupees. That the largesse kept gnawing at his mind was a different matter.

Bapu was very close to Gandhiji and other politicians and thinkers. Acharya Kripalani had introduced Bapu to Gandhiji at Pune in 1916. Thereafter Bapu had had two or three fleeting meetings with the great man. Gandhiji had already founded the Gujarat University at Ahmedabad. Kripalani was the Vice-chancellor of this university. Gandhiji was now taken up with the idea of establishing a special wing here for the study of the ancient cultures. He named the project Puratattva Mandir and wanted Muni Jin Vijayji to head and look after its working.

Muni Jin Vijayji lived at Pune. He was one of Bapu's close friends. He was a Sanskrit and Ardhamagadhi scholar and an authority on Jain literature. He had founded an educational institution and a publishing house at Pune and devoted most of his time to these. He had published *Jatak-Katha*, part one, translated by Bapu. Bapu's interest in Jainism sprung from his closeness to the Muni. The latter recommended Bapu for the post at the Puratattva Mandir.

Bapu too had received information about this new wing and was working to get a job there. Kakasaheb Kalelkar and Prof. Rasiklal Parekh were joint secretaries of the Gujarat University. Both were Bapu's good friends. Bapu wrote to Kalelkar who immediately arranged a meeting with Gandhiji at Sabarmati. Vallabhbhai Patel and other trustees were there too. They had a meeting on the spot and confirmed Bapu's appointment at three hundred and fifty rupees, a hundred more than the other professors. However, Bapu turned down Gandhiji's request that he should agree to be at the helm of the affairs of the new wing.

"If I did, I would be achieving nothing but a show of power," he argued to himself. His abhorrence for power was still unabated. Even Gandhiji's attempt at persuasion could not change his mind. Finally Muni Jin Vijayji was appointed as the head of the Puratattva Mandir.

Bapu took up residence at Ahmedabad in November 1922. He did not bring Bala over, but chose to live in a room on the campus. He could have certainly found a small flat. But didn't want to set up home

again. He was quite satisfied with the arrangements that he had made. Bala and two daughters were happily adjusted at Indore, he visited them as frequently as he could. Anna was there and via him he had met many more scholars. However, he began to build a house on the plot he had bought from Bhandarkar. His present salary was more than adequate to cover expenses for the house and for Baba's education. He had left him money only for a year and for the house too.

In a year's time the house got completed. Bapu moved Bala to the house. In a way the decision got thrust on him for by now Manik, a sweet-natured go-getter, had found a job of her liking which was far more advantageous than that of a Superintendent of girls hostel. She had bagged the job of a companion for Tukojirao's daughter Shakuntalaraje. The prince had been looking for a companion for his daughter and Manik filled the bill. She was very fluent in English, was an authority on western etiquettes and as an unmarried person had all the time in the world to devote to the princess. The interflow of the two cultures was found to be exquisite. She impressed the prince as someone made for the job. Manik loved it too. All she had to do, was to talk and read English literature with the princess, have good food, ride in cars and travel in five star comfort all over the country. Perfect. Now she had money to throw and the luxurious life style she wanted to have. She and the princess played tennis, rode horses and bantered to their heart's content with other princesses and rich ladies. Sometimes they wore skirts and blouses. But generally Manik wore in nine yard saris and chintz blouses with a variety of sleeves. She had reacted radically, though not rebelliously, to Bapu's accent on simplicity. Of all the Kosambi children she would be the only one to enjoy and rub shoulders with high society. Kamlu would do that too later, but her enjoyment was not as supreme as Manik was an absolute extrovert. Kamlu was a very private person. She didn't go out of her way to make friends or even to have fun. She was perfectly happy being with herself.

Bala took charge of the house and set it up with help from Mangu and the servants whom he got from Chikhali. But Bapu continued to live at Ahmedabad. He had to, for his job was there. But as before he continued to visit. When she was at Indore, Bala had curbed her wanderlust because Indore was far away from her usual haunts Goa, Belgaum and Mumbai. Now she took up the hobby again entrusting the household to someone or the other. It is to be wondered how much living together the Kosambi family did in this house or even anywhere else.

Manu had been shifted to the hostel at Indore. Now she had been deprived even of the two tiny rooms which passed for home. She hated the hostel. In the vacation she was sent to Pune. But here too she missed the ambience of a home. Often she was taken to Chikhali. She was good at her studies and excellent at sports. Everybody loved her. But inwardly she was pining for a home. She had been constantly tossed into hostels or taken to Chikhali. Then pulled over with equal ruthlessness to suit her father's plans. At no point did she have a say in the sort of life that she would like to have. This had played havoc with her ego though as usual, Bapu had not even given it a thought. In her too this would lead to a personality disorder. Neglected, if not downright rejected like Kamlu, Manu craved for a home to have a power base for herself, a place where she would control others instead of the others playing around with her life. She would be happy only with people whom she could control and control absolutely. She would break off with all others sometimes after fighting belligerently, sometimes after simply being incommunicado with them.

At Ahmedabad Bapu found many good Gujarati students and left the mark of his thirst for knowledge on them. Even colleagues like Rasiklal, Bechardas Doshi, Jin Vijayji and Pandit Sukhlalji learnt Pali from him. He was happy. Popularizing Pali had been the ambition of his life and he was achieving it now. During this period he also wrote *Buddha Sanghacha Parichay* (Introduction to the Buddhist Order, *Samadhimarg* (Way To Meditation) and *Buddhacharita* (The Life Of The Buddha). All these got published in Marathi, then in Gujarati.

His correspondence with Dr. Woods was uninterrupted. To his regret the editing of the *Vishuddhimarga*, his favourite book, was still unfinished. He had been first appointed for this work in 1910. Since then Harvard had published many Pali books, quite a few edited by Bapu himself. But the first one had lagged behind. At the beginning of 1924 Dr. Woods informed him that Prof. Lanman would soon be retiring. He asked whether Bapu would like to visit Harvard again and complete it. Obviously Bapu's answer couldn't be anything but affirmative.

The Lauds pointed out that this time if he undertook the assignment, Bala would not be uprooted. The house belonged to them, Bapu could not wind up the establishment there. The thought did not exactly bring roses to Bala's wan cheeks. She was still perturbed for Manik's marriage. And even though she had made some adjustment towards having a husband who would put in a guest appearance only instead of playing the leadplayer, she still dreaded the thought of not

having him at all for a few years.

Suddenly, she received one more shock. Bapu offered his house, theirs, for charity. In the course of one of his speeches in Goa he made an announcement that he would sell his house for twenty thousand rupees and give away the money for a girls' school. He requested many friends to find him people who would found and run such a school. Even though Dada had said that he would not get upset by anything that Bapu did any more he hit the ceiling.

"Mangu! Has he gone totally crazy? The house is the only property he has got and he wants to give it away? What about Baba? The girls? How will he get Manik married? Has Kamlu been given to Kakibai for good? What will I do with her after she clears the fourth standard? Should she clean cowpens? Should she cook and embroider?" She fumed.

"Bapu has laid down certain conditions for his donation. Bala should be paid twenty rupees per month and all his children below eighteen should be given twenty too," Mangu notified Dada.

"You know all this? How come you never informed me?"

"What is the point? Is Bapu going to listen to us or to anyone? He takes his commands only from Lord Buddha and no one else. Still, if you so wish, you might argue with him on the point. Bala will go berserk if he finds people to take up the project."

"I am not going to utter a word any more. Let Bala persuade him or use force. If she wants to keep the house she has to open her mouth. She has the gall to fight with others! Why not with Bapu?"

"Her thinking is influenced by the fear that Bapu would go in for sanyas. *Pravrajya* in Pali."

"Do you mean to say he has not gone for it already? I buy the kids' clothes, their tickets, Bala's saris, and more important, I worry for them all. Bapu doesn't. That is sanyas or *Pravrajya* or whatever!"

"Bapu worries only for the society and the country. And a little bit for Baba because he had been pushed into that education by Bapu. Bala is supposed to look after herself and the kids out of the money that he gives her. What we give her is a gift."

"Twenty rupees! That, according to Bapu, is her requirement and the extent of his duty towards her, and that of his daughters below eighteen. Obviously after eighteen he wants them to be on their own. He is not going to look for husbands for them. Inform Manik. Ask her to have a talk with Bapu."

Mangu wrote a letter to Manik. She wrote back.

"Bapu wants to live for certain principles. We should not set obstacles in his way. He would not pay heed to our suggestion any way. I am sending a hundred rupees herewith for Aai and fifty for you. Buy a sari for Kakibai. Repair the roof." Manik was generous to the point of being a squanderer.

Even though that house was no home Bala valued it as provision for her old days. She couldn't help registering a mild complaint.

"Why should you sell the house? You know so many VIPS. You could easily raise donations worth twenty thousand rupees."

"Certainly. And I am going to do that too. I will be getting money even from my friends in America. I have also asked my friends in Goa to raise ten thousand rupees. But not while I have a property. I do not want to practise duplicity by hanging on to my own money while begging for others'. This is calumnious. I don't like it."

"How can it be calumnious? If you had a vast estate and you sat on it, people might blame you. But the house is all that you have. Surely we are entitled to have a home?"

"That house got built because I was given a salary that was far disproportionate to other people's salaries. Everybody gets two hundred and fifty rupees. I get a hundred more. The house comes from that surplus. I am dutybound to spend money for charity."

Bala gave up. Her marital life had always been far from perfect. It mattered very little to her if the house was sold. Manu cried her heart out when she heard the news. But this was futile too.

Finally Bapu had to drop the project. He couldn't find anyone to take it up. And so finally Bala got to keep the house.

TWENTY TWO

1924-1925

Baba had been at Cambridge for six years without a break. He proved himself to be an extraordinarily gifted student. Very few matched his accomplishments in studies. In addition to French, which was his second language, he had qualified himself in Greek and Latin. He also had a very fair knowledge of Spanish and Italian. The advance made by him in mathematics and physics was outstanding. He cleared the entrance with flying colours and got a scholarship for Harvard University.

Baba's success elated everybody, his family, Bapu's friends and relatives. However, Bapu reacted in the most unexpected way; he slashed his salary by a hundred and fifty rupees on the grounds that he did not need to send Baba money anymore (even though Baba could have found use for it) He could easily complete his years at the University within the scholarship that he had earned. This must be the only known event of the sort in the history of any family!

"I had to agree to accept an astronomical salary of three hundred and fifty rupees for the job. For me this was at par with a major calamity," he complained constantly. He had done so even to Gandhiji who considered this as a well-deserved remuneration.

"Nobody has a grouse for your salary, Kaushambi. Don't be perturbed by it. Remember that your work is excellent. Consider this as a so-called predicament enforced on you for the sake of public service," Gandhiji had jested and argued making it quite clear that the salary was not a controversial issue. But as ever Bapu was adamant.

"Such projects are to be done gratis only. Some day I would love to teach at the Gujarat University without taking a single rupee," he said. He was also entertaining thoughts of one more visit to Harvard.

Meanwhile Baba had reached the tether end of his patience and tolerance. He wanted to be back at whatever cost. Dr. Woods. The more realistic of his guardians, could see that the boy would have permanent psychological disturbances if he was not sent home at least for a brief vacation. He pined for his mother and Manik, sentiments that Bapu had no understanding for or fear of. He had been buffeted by them a few times, but had always managed to overpower them by

the force of his will power or by means of ploys like distancing himself from his loved ones and going in for sanyas. For him feelings were weaknesses any way. He obviously expected the same of his son. But Woods could not, he fully sympathized with Baba's anguish. Uprooted at a very young age, Baba had spent the six years in some kind of a cell, an intellectual one, yet all the same a cell. Bapu had left hundred and fifty dollars for Baba's passage. Woods bought Baba a passage on a steamer. "My son going to be back! My son is coming back!" Bala told everyone shedding tears of joy and happiness.

"Bapu was away for six years, Baba was away for six years too. I could see this six years' separation from the two important Kosambi men in your horoscope," Narshabhat interpreted the signs.

Bala was petrified.

"Bapu returned after six years. But did not stay with me for good. I had to share him with many friends. Would the same pattern mark Baba's case? Would he be distanced from me forever?" she asked Mangu who for once had no answer for her. He had his own anxieties to think of, the nonavailability of cheap labour, the shortage of cattle and the astronomical figure of the outstanding he just couldn't recover. This time Bala did not bother to hire the services of a tantrik.

"Whatever will happen will happen," she muttered to herself. She had given up moulding her life as per her wishes and dreams.

A massive throng received Baba at the dock. This time Bala had brought the six year old Kamlu with her. But she was disoriented and whimpered for Kakibai all the time. Nobody recognized Baba. The scrawny boy dressed in half pants and shirt, who had left for Richmond crying and moping had been metamorphosed into a tall, handsome, bright and trouser-clad young man. He was Americanized. But like Manik he too would take to wearing Indian clothes later.

Baba saw only one person in that throng, his mother. She was forty one, but unlike Bapu had not aged much. Her hair was dark and thick, eyes a little forlorn, but from that distance Baba couldn't note that. She had put on a little weight, but was ramrod straight. He sprinted down the stairs clearing two and three at a time and held her in a tight embrace.

"Baba! Is that you?" Bala kept asking. Due to the tears that coursed down her cheeks she couldn't see anything. Quite a few in the throng were overcome and began to shed tears themselves.

"Aai! You cried when I left. And you are crying when I am back. What does this mean? Should I stay or go?" Baba quipped. He

had picked up American humour. But was visibly overcome. The crowd was zapped. Baba was talking in fluent Konkani!

"You have changed! You are so tall!" Bala whispered reaching high to touch his cheeks.

"You haven't. Or maybe you have. You have got wrinkles on your face." Baba bent his knees to make himself more accessible to her.

"I am not getting any younger" she answered, regaining her composure.

"I will take care of you, Aai! I will see that you do not get any more wrinkles," Baba promised grinding his teeth. "She scrimped and worried," his mind concluded. Bapu's money problems were no secret from him.

Bala burst out in tears again.

"Come on, Baba! Meet the others," Manik took charge of the situation and calmed down mother and son.

"Who is this princess? I don't think I know her," Baba jested. Under the garb of humour he always spoke the truth. Manik was indeed looking like someone born with a silver spoon in her mouth. Baba wrapped an arm round Bala and together they greeted all their friends and relatives.

From Mumbai the family went to Pune and thence to Sankhwal and Chikhali to meet more people, Ramchandradada, his sons and grandsons, the Lauds, even Magha and Martul and others who had not been able to travel down to Mumbai to receive Baba. Baba had been nostalgic for the Laud house too. But now its lack of plumbing and floors plastered with cowdung kept bothering him. He was through with primitivism.

Back at Pune, Baba tried to seek admission at the Fergusson College. But couldn't get it. No college in India would have him. The certificate that he got after finishing school could not be matched with that of matriculation by the college authorities in India. Bapu could have done something about it. But was reluctant to use his contacts or even to have a talk with anybody. Baba didn't care. He just took it easy. After years spent in dormitories he enjoyed being at home. However, he was not at a loose end. He learnt Sanskrit from the Shastris at the Bhandarkar Oriental Institute. On his eightieth birthday Dr. Bhandarkar and some of his friends had founded the institute. And ofcourse he continued to do research in mathematics.

Harvard had once again sent an invitation to Bapu. He decided

to take it up and take Baba along. Bala was shattered again. The months she had spent with him at Pune were some of the best in her life. Her wanderlust, a form of crass escapism, had vanished. Life was beautifully stable and marked with an unflinching routine. She doted on her son, preparing the coconut curries he had been deprived of for six years.

It was Baba who did not have a routine, not one followed by the rest of the populace of Pune anyway. He read late into the night, sometimes till dawn. He got up around 10 a.m., sometimes even later, depending on how much sleep he had had the night before. He got on with four to five hours of sleep in a twenty four hours cycle. Sometimes he had breakfast when the others were having lunch. He frequently skipped lunch and had an early dinner. His schedule was the one he had followed at the dormitory. Nor did he share the Punaites' philosophy of being available to anyone at all times of the day and night. If visitors turned up to say hello, needy strangers to pick up information about life in America or get something translated from French or Italian, whatever it was, Baba was out of bounds from one and all if he was busy. He was the embodiment of friendship and full of wit and humour only for those whom he met in his leisure hours. During his busy hours he was a demon if anybody disturbed him. Punaites had not come across such a type nor did they have tolerance for one. They raised eyebrows. They passed strictures on Baba's behaviour and branded him an eccentric. Their etiquette dictated that a man should be available to everybody who needs him and at all times. Baba's priorities shocked them.

Baba didn't care. And Bala was not inconvenienced, not a bit. She hovered by his room like a watchdog taking care that nobody disturbed him. She was ever ready to serve him whatever he asked for, fruit, bread, milk, anything, and at any odd hour. Her world revolved around him.

Once some people visited them with a prescription. It was for a French medicine which they had not been able to find anywhere. All they wanted was its translation in English.

"Baba is reading right now," Bala informed them, casting an oblique glance at Baba's door. One room in the house was Bapu's study. Baba had been given this as soon as he arrived. Bapu did not use it any way. Baba never locked the door, but didn't take cognizance of what was happening outside that would splinter his concentration.

"This is a matter of life and death for somebody. You must, call him," the visitors argued. Now Bala was flustered. "Surely a few

moments' delay will not make a difference? Leave this paper with me. I will get it translated from him as soon as he emerges from his study,"

The people were visibly angry. They left, muttering profanities. They never came back. They found someone else to render the translation. Later on Bala ran into some of them.

"You should knock some sense into your son's thick head, you know. This is not America. Here people do have concern for others' problems and are expected to have it. What good is knowledge if it could not be made use of for other people's need?" They said, venting their anger.

"He is full of concern for everybody. The other day the gardener broke his knee. Baba carried him all the way to the hospital. Is this callousness? But he has his priorities. If he is sitting with a book or pen and paper, he is lost to the rest of the world. He is in meditation. Do you disturb a man who is meditating?" Bala argued. Still the bottomline impression about Baba remained.

Baba never meditated. But he came very close to doing it whenever he got lost in his thinking. A love for meditation and other spiritual experiences was one thing he had not inherited from Bapu. But there were many other qualities and likes and dislike that were common to the Kosambi father and son. In fact at time his teachers got the impression that the son's sole goal was to surpass Bapu. Whether this was intentional or subconscious, buried deep down in Bala's bedrock, was not known. His love for India was as profound as Bapu's. He never entertained the thought of settling in the U.S.A. even though such a move would have been financially and intellectually extremely rewarding for him. His love for exercise was another legacy. Like Bapu he was very fond of exercising. At Cambridge he had enjoyed trekking for miles. He missed these pleasures at Pune for there was no gym. However, he walked for hours in the surrounding hills and did yoga. He had also found stone slabs weighing fifteen and ten pounds. He balanced them over his head and walked round the house for an hour to relax his back muscles weakened by the hours that he spent slouched over his desk. Like Bapu he was a staunch Marxist and would apply these tenets to interpret ancient Indian history. Incredible though it might seem to many, he was a people lover too like Bapu. But could not take people all the time. They had to wait and take their turn only when he found time for them. Bapu was available round the clock. Also, unlike Bapu, he did not walk away from controversies or from people he could not get on with. He put down his feet and said so. He

had a very short temper and loved to call a spade, howsoever abrasive it might turn out to be. In fact he loved to needle others by his plain speaking. This frankness was a from of truthfulness, but was more lethal than that of Bapu. The latter kept the truth to himself, at least sometimes, realising that it could be painful and unpleasant to its recipients. Baba could not do this. While Bapu was a cave dweller at heart Baba was a goliath.

Bala hated to be separated from Baba, but she could see that there was no alternative. If he failed to graduate for lack of admission to a college in India all that brilliance would remain untapped. Even Baba was in a frame of mind to go to Cambridge and utilize his scholarship which had been put on hold for a while.

"Aai! Don't you sulk now. It has to be done, it has to be done. I won't be gone for long. As soon as we are back I would have you with me," Baba reassured her.

"Yes, you are right. You have to go. I can see that. But I hope Bapu finds a husband for Manik before he departs. She will be twenty six soon. I don't want her to be an old spinster."

"I agree Bapu should indeed take some interest in that project whenever he could find time from his devotion to projects concerning the society and country," Baba commented in that amusing sarcastic style that he had developed. He too was worried about his sister.

"That project is getting more and more difficult day by day," Bala could not help pointing out. She had sleepless nights over this issue. "The Saraswat families are not noticing her for she is never around. She is always at hill stations and palaces with Shakuntalaraje. So no proposals are coming her way. Most of the suitable boys of her age have been married by now."

"She has become a princess. She will marry only a prince."

"Don't you joke, This is exactly what I fear. She is not going to fit into the traditional framework of cooking, cleaning etc. She has to have a good life. I can see that. That is why I do not press Bapu to get her married. He too wants to. But supposing she is not happy there? What is the point in getting her married? She is better off where she is."

"Aai! Sanskrit scholars have stated that before God gives birth to a girl he gives birth to her husband. He will turn up," Baba jested again. He had more pressing worries on his hand like the problems of mathematics. Manik's marriage was on the bottom rung of the ladder.

But Baba's wisecrack turned out to be correct. Suddenly Bapu found a good boy for Manik. He was walking by the Gamdevi road,

Mumbai, on the 25th of June. He was staying with Mr. Nair who had a flat nearby.

"Kosambi!" He heard someone call him in American English. Swivelling, he noticed Dr. Ram Prasad, in his early thirties, tall and fair, sprinting towards him. He wore tan trousers and a grey sports jackets. He came from the Aiyangar community, Bangalore, and he was a Brahmin. Bapu had met him at Harvard. He had secured a doctorate in electrical engineering from M.I.T. He had gone there on a scholarship from the government of Mysore, but had supplemented it by doing all kinds of chores. Bapu had registered him as a brilliant goodnatured and hardworking student. Now suddenly he got a brainwave.

"Hello, Prasad! When did you return from M.I.T.?" Prasad had gone to Germany for a job.

"Two days back. I am on my way to Bangalore."

"I live nearby. How about dropping in? I want to talk to you," Bapu said. He would have offered a proposal then and there but for the presence of three friends with Prasad.

Dr. Prasad complied. The next day he visited Bapu at Nair's flat. The two bantered a bit about old times, then Bapu came to the point:

"You have seen Manik. She is not married yet. Would you like to marry her?"

"Who can say no to Manik?" Dr. Prasad immediately gave an answer in the affirmative. His parents had been pressing him to get married. But he was not happy with the thought of marrying someone who was not exposed to a wider world. He had met Manik two or three times casually. She had made an impression on him as an intelligent, beautiful, smart and sweet natured girl. This was just the kind of American- Indian personality that he had in mind for a wife.

"I do hope Manik would consent. I will write to her immediately," Bapu said. The comment was radically against the unwritten rules of the marriage market. The girl's consent needed to be confirmed first. Bapu's behaviour had never conformed to such traditional norms and it didn't do so now. However, Dr. Prasad did not mind.

Manik and the princess were at Ooty at this time enjoying the cool climate there. Manik wrote back to say:

"Dr. Ram Prasad 's family is very orthodox. They are bound to follow stringent rules of vegetarianism and untouchability. It would be beyond me to live with such a set of rules."

Bala too wondered why a Saraswat boy could not be found for Manik.

"Find me one who has a doctorate from M.I.T. in a difficult subject like engineering," Bapu snubbed her. He was really in love with Prasad's qualifications. He candidly notified Prasad of the contents of Manik's letter.

"I hope she gets married before I leave," Baba commented. This was his only interest in the matter.

But Prasad would not give up. He wrote back to say that these were not major impediments, that he could remove them with one hand tied behind him. Bala too changed her attitude now.

"He has been swept off his feet, I think we should make the marriage happen somehow. Bapu is right. There can be very few boys with such high qualifications," she averred.

Now the matter could no more be discussed in letters. Bapu decided to go to Ooty and have a talk with Manik.

"Aai! Start making preparations for the wedding. We all know what Bapu means by having a talk. He will browbeat her into marrying the chap."

"I hope he does. If she does not get married now she will never get married. She needs to be forced into marriage."

Bapu did not have to go to Ooty. The monsoon had arrived there and the two girls had moved to Bangalore to the Jaymahal palace of the Vadiars. Bapu had informed Prasad of his plan. The latter had received him at the station and taken him to one of his friends. Not to his parents' place. His father was a retired District Judge and lived in his own house at Bangalore. Prasad was reluctant to confide the matter to them at this juncture. A marriage out of community was an adventure in those times, especially one between an orthodox Brahmin and a fish loving girl. He himself reported for the government job that he had found at Shivasamudram.

Bapu had a meeting with Manik at the palace. He reasoned with her for a long time mentioning all those points the family had summarised. But did not get anywhere. She really dreaded having all those nagging rules of orthodoxy thrust on her. A stint at Radcliff and subsequently this job had given her a taste for freedom and dilettantism. She firmly declined the idea.

"Bapu! I acted against my wish and took up that superintendent's job at Indore. There it didn't make much difference for it was but a short term arrangement. Marriage is for life. I do not see myself fasting

and performing pujas day in and day out. I am sorry, but for once I cannot acquiesce," she said.

Bapu dropped a line to Prasad and returned to Pune. The next weekend Prasad was at the palace himself arguing his suit.

"Manik! I am not going to stay with my family. I have a very high post. I am a member of the local club. I play tennis with other officers and Europeans. You won't even have to cook. The servants will do it. And you are free to eat fish or whatever. I will impose no restrictions on you. I have a car. As soon as I make it to the office I will send the car to you. You may shop, visit friends, have fun."

Prasad had painted the picture of a titillating life style, exactly the one that she wanted. Her only objection to getting married was her fear of getting squeezed into a middle class existence. Now she began to reflect favourably over this proposal.

"Secondly, Shakuntalaraje is bound to get married herself sooner or later. What then will be your plight? You may lose the job. You may have to go back to Pune or even to Chikhali. Kosambi is always talking of selling his house," There! That really was a clinching argument. Still Manik asked for a little time to ponder. But she wrote a short note to Bapu saying she was willing to marry Prasad. More than anything else his loving nature had impressed her. Bala, Bapu, the Lauds, Kosambis, everybody was overcome relief and happiness. Nobody worried about the difference in the communities and languages. Baba was the one who was the most amused.

"Bapu finally 'persuaded' her," He kept remarking with guffaws.

"Baba! Don't you erode her happiness by jesting about it."

"Aai! How can you make such a statement? Humour is supposed to be the spice of life."

"Well, we do not want too much spice here," Bala admonished him. But he was irrepressible.

Orthodox though Prasad's parents were they did not raise an objection. Manik and Prasad were engaged on the 8th of July and married on the 18th of November.

Prasad had ceaseless love for Manik and the rest of the Kosambis too. As promised, he gave Manik a high society life style, club, parties, shopping, car drives and visits. He also took over all Bapu's duties. He saw Manu and Kamlu through college. Bapu did not lose a daughter. He really gained a son.

"Tai! Come on, confess! What did Bapu say to you? How much browbeating did you take before you crumbled? How long did you

resist?" Baba kept teasing Manik. He was very happy about the selection of Ram Prasad. At the same time he could not stop airing his opinion.

"I did not yield an inch to his counselling. But Dr. Prasad came to see him and I really liked him. He also promised me a life such as I wanted," Manik clarified gravely. A few years later she would claim that she had fallen in love and that theirs was a love marriage. However, at that time, she was reluctant to use that word 'love'.

"Why didn't he impress you earlier? We were already acquainted with him. Come on, admit that your change of heart coincided with your meeting with Bapu."

"It didn't. Baba! You have to believe me. It does seem to be a case of pressurizing, but it was not, I assure you. When we had met earlier the thoughts of marriage were not in my mind nor in his. It is only when he argued his case that I understood and appreciated his concern for everybody, specially for me."

"Baba! Bapu pointed out Prasad's qualities to her and she changed her opinion of him," Bala asserted.

"Yes, Aai! I have no doubt that he did. However, in common parlance it is not always called persuading, it is called bullying."

"He never does that, Baba!" This was Bala again, rushing to her husband's defense.

"My point is why doesn't he persuade the others? Why does he always use this flair on his children? Why did he not persuade the trustees of the Fergusson College to give him an appropriate salary? Why doesn't he browbeat Prof Lanman instead of leaving the book incomplete? For others he is the man of principles whereas over the kids he exerts paternal power," Baba said guffawing.

"Look! He too didn't want to get you into the Harvard Grammar School. Woods insisted on that and he just complied."

"That is exactly my point."

"Are you arguing that you did not benefit by joining the Harvard Grammar School? Would you have received all those awards and the scholarship if you had continued to be at the Ringe? You would be fixing doors and windows right now had you been there."

"That is besides the point. I am just pointing out a trait in his character."

"Think what you want. You have such a one-way-traffic mind! Nothing would change your prejudices," Manik said sharply. Baba guffawed even louder. He just enjoyed his own jokes.

TWENTY THREE

January 1926 – February 1930

Now Bapu was in a hurry to get to Harvard. But he still had to get something done before he did that, meet Gandhiji and seek his formal approval. Not that his decision depended on it. A tie of strong friendship had arisen between the two when Bapu had been serving at the Puratattva Mandir. Bapu held Gandhiji in very high esteem for applying principles to politics, proverbially a dirty game. Gandhiji revered Bapu as a scholar and spiritual man who applied these to his personal life, a rare find. This often led to sessions of mutual eulogizing. Bapu didn't want to follow any line of action without seeking Gandhiji's support for it. The great leader had just been released from prison and was recuperating at Narottam Murarji's bungalow at Juhu. Bapu went over and apprised him of his plans.

"Why do you want to go to the States? I know that is a great place for achievement. Many luxuries are available there. Still I have named all the Western countries as places of enjoyment and our own country as a place of achievement, for there are very few opportunities here for enjoyment, but very good ones for slogging for our people," Gandhiji said, venting his own perspective.

"My purpose in visiting America is not enjoyment of luxuries. I have been there twice already and spent altogether five and a half years. The enjoyments there never gripped my mind or entrapped me. I would prefer toiling here any time. However, right now this choice is not open to me. Had my son not been in America I could have worked at a nominal salary here to my immense satisfaction. However, under the present conditions I am overcome with a strong desire to earn dollars in America while my son is finishing college and then serve the Gujarat University without remuneration," Bapu answered with his usual candour. Gandhiji could not help agreeing with the force of his logic and acquiesced.

Bapu resigned from the Puratattva Mandir in December 1925 and sailed to Boston with Baba. He returned two years later, in September 1927. This time he had finally completed the editing of the *Vishuddhimarga*. The printing was on way. Bapu was happy. Dr. Woods

had requested him to stay on for a while and translate the work into English. But somehow Bapu was in a hurry to get back home now. He had promised Gandhiji that he would teach at the Gujarat University as a honorary professor and he wanted to do that. He recommended Dr. P.V. Bapat for the translation. Bapat was his student, now a professor at the Fergusson College.

Bapat was as enthusiastic as Bapu. He stayed at Harvard for three years. Not only did he translate the *Vishuddhimarga* in English he learnt Chinese and wrote a thesis on a subject in that language. Later on he was invited by Shantiniketan, Tagore's institution, to translate some ancient Chinese works into English.

Bala had always wanted to go on a pilgrimage. Bapu took her to all the Hindu ones and some of the easily approachable Buddhist ones too. She even wanted to visit Harvard and meet Baba. But Bapu did not have enough money for that. He had started working at the Puratattva Mandir without a salary. Kamlu had cleared the fourth standard at Chikhali. That was the only school that little hole of a place had. Bapu got her into Ahilyashrama at Indore. Manu was in the final year there which would give Kamlu a year to get adjusted. Manik had a daughter Usha. Bala had wanted to have the child born at Chikhali. But Dr. Prasad was too scared to send her to that primitive place. So finally at his insistence they chose Bangalore. He had been posted at Bangalore and had rented a house there. As promised he did not impinge Manik with the trauma of living in an orthodox joint family. Bala camped here for months before and after Usha was born.

Very soon they all had the occasion to attend one more wedding in the family, Martul's, as longdrawn a project as Manik's. Martul had crossed the age of twenty two. All efforts to find a suitable boy for her had failed. Her lack of good educational qualifications was one more obstacle and this overrode her sweetness and good looks. Tall, straight, slim and good natured, Martul herself entertained no thought of marriage. She was perfectly happy to be with Dada and Magha doing nothing. She still had her band of friends married though they were by now and some of them with one or two kids. If she felt like doing something she embroidered.

Finally a boy had been found for her with the help of Damubab, the fellow who had pestered Subhadra for an alliance for Magha. He had crossed sixty now, had filled up quite a bit and his thick mop of hair was white like cotton ball. His son looked after his shops and his business now, that of finding good clients for the Devdasis. He himself

had taken to spending his days on his verandah. He was very active, jaunting in the bazaars and temples and earning money whenever possible. He frequently met Magha at the weekly bazaar at Mhapsa, a fairlike scene, stalls arrayed by the side of the road selling everything from dry fish and grain to imported watches and cloth. Magha had no ill feelings for him, Nor did Dada. He had picked up a profession and was following it to the best of his ability. He was probably helping the Devdasis by extricating them from a worse fate.

"How is the doctor? How is Martul?" were Damubab's stock queries.

"They are fine. The doctor is besides himself with worry for Martul's marriage. Noone would have her," Magha would answer candidly.

One day Damubab visited Magha at her house. Dressed in a fine jari bordered muslin dhoti, muslin zabba, black cap and shining pump shoes he looked the spitting image of a successful importer-exporter.

"Magha! I have found or rather I have come across a perfect match for Martul," he began.

"I do not want to keep her with someone," Magha spat back. She did not have an excessively introspective nature. Still at times she repented having adopted Martul. If she should have just let her be a Kathkari and given her a house and other possessions she would have been married by now.

"I am not talking of a liaison. I have marriage in my mind. That's why I have come here. But he is married. She would be his second wife."

"What is wrong with his first wife? Supposing he jilts my daughter later?"

"He won't. He is good-natured. His marriage is in ruins. His parents got him married to a rich girl at a very early age. She is admittedly a shrew. Even his parents are repenting that match now. He wants a sweet-natured and goodlooking girl. He will give her a flat, a car, jewellery everything. His parents would give their blessing. They want nothing but marital happiness for their son. Because of the travesty of his marriage he is not willing to marry a girl from their own community. I have talked to him about Martul. He has nothing against her caste or parentage. If you approve of the idea I will write to him and get him over."

"I have to ask Doctor," Magha's voice was tremulous. Yet she could see that this was the best proposal under the circumstances, that

there was not going to be another one, ever, of any sort.

She consulted Dada who talked it over with all his siblings. Everybody agreed that they should not balk at the status of a second wife for Martul. As soon as Damubab got the green signal he got the bridegroom over. He had just touched thirty, was lean, pleasant and debonairly dressed in dhoti and silk shirt. He was fluent in Marathi even though his mother tongue was Gujarati. He fell for Martul at first sight. Martul too liked him. He got his uncle over. His parents sent their blessings and tons of jewellery for Martul. But they didn't want to attend the wedding for fear of facing a tirade of accusations within their caste. This time Narshbhat did not pose any difficulties. He married the pair in the temple at Chikhali and predicted a life time of happiness for the couple. For once his prophecy came true. Martul's husband lodged her in her own flat. She had a daughter, Rohini. She became a graduate in course of time and was wedded to a nice Gujarati boy. Finally and happily for her, her roots got eradicated.

Bapu too had made it, point to attend Martul's wedding. As before he visited Bala at Pune every now and then, but the campus at Ahmedabad was his home. He translated *Mazzimanikaya* and *Suttanipat* into Marathi. These got translated to Gujarati too.

Manu got through the matriculation examination with first class. She joined a college in Bangalore. Kamlu continued to be in Ahilyashrama. But during vacations she came down to Bangalore. For Dr. Prasad's home was the Kosambis home now. Mangu frequently visited the Prasads there. Manik too regularly visited Chikhali, never once forgetting to give them gifts in cash and kind. She could never forget how kind and concerned her uncles, the Lauds, were for them during their father's absences.

Around this time Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru had been to Russia. He had written an article about his experiences there. There was a reference to there an institution at Leningrad established for the study of Buddhism. It had roused Bapu's curiosity. Russia had become communist, there was a ban there on all religions. How come they had made an exception of Buddhism and founded an institution for its study? He wondered. He wrote to Nehru stating his desire to visit that institution if possible. Nehru wrote back immediately to say that he should and that the visit would be tremendously beneficial. He had also enclosed the address of VOKS, an institution that catered to keeping up cultural relations with other countries.

Bapu now remembered that he had an acquaintance at Leningrad

too, Prof. Chebotski. He was a colleague of Dr. Woods and Anna at Bonn. He had studied Sanskrit too. In 1909 he had visited Mumbai to study Sanskrit from Nityanandaswami. He had stayed with Anna at that time and Anna had introduced him to Bapu. However, Bapu had lost touch with him, they had never corresponded. But now he did. He wrote two letters, one to Chebotski, another to VOKS. Answers to both these were received by Leningrad. He expressed deep jubilation in his letter and pressed Bapu to visit Leningrad.

Bapu did. He left Mumbai on 3rd March 1929 and reached Leningrad via Berlin. Chebotski had him as a house guest. He hosted a party for the members of the Akademi Of Sciences, Leningrad. The idea was to bring them face to face with Bapu's knowledge, career and personality. It worked. Soon Bapu was appointed as a professor of Pali at this institute. A little later he got a similar post at the Leningrad University. Once again his flair for swiftly picking up foreign languages was proven. He became very fluent in Russian. He had learnt it at Harvard during his first visit.

Prof Chebotski had cautioned Bapu not to expect a very high salary. Still he got three hundred and twenty five roubles from the two salaries combined. However, he could not utilize this amount for his family for the money could not be taken out of the country. But he happily spent it on travels and Russian books. He loved the sensational stories of Bolshevik heroes. He had planned to translate them in Marathi. But the project never took off. He only translated a children's story, *Ivan the Mad*, into Marathi.

Bapu spent more than ten months at Leningrad. His new friends were pressing him to stay on. But the thought of spending one more severe winter was unbearable. He returned home in February 1930.

TWENTY FOUR

March 1930 – May 1932

Bapu's belief in Marxism as the only saving grace of the poor and the hardworking had hardened into a strong conviction during his stay at Leningrad. He had watched closely the freedom struggle in India but had so far, not participated. He had now formed an opinion that this struggle needed to be fortified with the ideology of socialism. He wrote many articles expounding his new theory.

He had also closely watched the functioning of the trade unions in the U.S.A. He was of the opinion that similar organizations should be founded in India too. He believed that once socialism took roots here the British would abhor ruling over the country. However, the time was not yet right for a large scale socialistic awakening. Very few political leaders had heard of it or had been impressed by it. If Bapu had taken a plunge into active politics and made speeches about it from the rostrum of a political party may be he would have got somewhere and later on be commemorated as a pioneer of socialism in India. But he was most reluctant to do this himself. He equated political activism with power game and this had never appealed to him. He had no intention of getting into it. He had quickly found an alternative; he had taken to briefing the political leaders about it. As early as 1912 he had given a talk on 'Karl Marx, Biography and Doctrines' during the Vasant Vyakhyan Mala, a popular series of lectures held at Mumbai. N. C. Kelkar, the editor of *Kesari* and a noted writer, had chaired the function at that time. Kelkar was deeply impressed and referred to socialism in his lectures. All the same he did not have the clout or the intention of injecting the new gospel into the politics of the country.

In 1929 Bapu had a meeting with Nehru before he left for Leningrad. He discussed this point at the time. The goals and policies of the Congress Party were nationalistic. Bapu suggested that they be changed to socialistic ones. Nehru too had not tried to do this. The immediate need of the country was to get herself released from the British government and for this, accent on nationalism alone was necessary. But soon after the meeting he chaired the Congress Session at Lahore and expounded and praised the new philosophy. He declared himself as a socialist. But that was as far as Bapu's effort would go.

"My thoughts got revolutionalized by this new philosophy. Many queries had been assailing my mind: Why can't our valiant kings and emperors hold out against a handful of British? We could eulogise past history to our heart's content, but why could we never effect its repetition? Why is it absolutely ineffective to base our present politics on tales of past glories or religious festivals like that of the Ganapati? Now I found answers to them all... Henceforward our war for freedom could no more be won by singing ballads commemorating the ancient past.... Our real prowess can be tapped only via the worker's unions... If we eradicate casteism and organize the Indian workers with socialistic gospels as basis the British would have to face the question 'to be or not to be.' It is not probable that they would be cowered by the murders of a few of their officers." *Khulasa*, chapter six.

The above was an unconcealed barb at the aggressive stance taken against the British by Tilak and the Hindu Mahasabha. With one swipe of his pen Bapu had antagonized Tilak's ideology and its adherents. He measured everybody with the philosophies and faiths that he had imbibed. It never occurred to him that under the present circumstances others too could be partially right, justifiable or forgivable. He had no rapport with reality, only with high principles and this was a shortcoming. Nor did he want to participate personally in the freedom movement. This was typical Bapu though. He ceaselessly recommended whatever had the ring of magnanimous principles and had been mulled over and processed by his mind as good for a movement or person. This was branded as myopism, even some kind of capriciousness, by many since it was totally broken off from reality. If ever Bapu had worked in the arena of politics he would have modified his opinions. But by his own admission he couldn't since he didn't have any tolerance for human failings and weaknesses.

He fell off with Tilak's followers on one more point: his criticism of the *Bhagwat Gita*. He held that the *Gita*, the scripture of the Hindus written by Krishna and taught to Arjuna on the battlefield, did not promote nonviolence at all since a war had been sanctioned by it. This is not the right view about the philosophy of the *Gita*. Krishna does propound nonviolence in it. He was specially against cow slaughter during sacrifices. At some point the scripture just got incorporated in the *Mahabharat* and in the process its message got a bit twisted. Baba would point out in his *History Of The Indian Cultures And Civilizations* that this was an outcome of the transition from the hunter's and warriors' life style to a peaceful agrarian one wherein cattle was immensely

useful for agriculture. Since Bapu was not a contender for political or any other power nobody bothered to argue with him. They knew that his opinions were bound to be supported by the books that he read and their respect for him as a scholar never ebbed.

On the 12th of March Gandhiji began his Dandi March. The cause was a special and unjust tax levied by the British on salt. The cause got quickly taken up all over the country. The movement was especially strong near the salt pans by the Western coasts. In Maharashtra many centres were inaugurated to support the movement.

Bapu, just back from Russia, moved to Mumbai. He kept in close touch with the centre at Vile Parle. The centre organized a meeting of all the officebearers of centres all over Maharashtra for a comprehensive feedback. During the meeting it was reported that most of the leaders at Shiroda, a small place near Malwan, had been sent to the prison by the British.

Bapu decided on the spot to go to Shiroda and somehow keep the centre on its legs till the Maharashtra Satyagraha Mandal appointed other leaders there. This was the first time in known history that he had been stirred deeply enough to participate in active politics. He had always professed till then that he would never be upto rubbing shoulders day in and day out with throngs of people'. Nor would they with him unless they paid absolute obeisance to the commandments that he had set out for them. He even bought a ticket on the steamer leaving for Malwan the next evening. Whether the others were aware of it or not Bapu was not interested in making the Satyagraha successful at whatever cost. His interest lay in keeping the Satyagraha restricted to the framework of principles spoken up by Gandhiji.

Characteristically he asked for a letter of authority from the Maharashtra Satyagraha Mandal. He quickly got assured that a letter would be sent to Shiroda. But it never turned up much to his disappointment and chagrin. He constantly asked for that letter for he felt like an outsider in the absence of a proof of official appointment. But all he got was vacuous assurances.

The steamer docked at an unearthly hour in the morning. Bapu had met an acquaintance on the steamer who arranged for his stay with the Wagh family. But all his enthusiasm had drained off now. He felt sadly let down. That letter was the first thing he had made queries about, it wasn't there, no message either and he didn't want to manage the centre or even to guide the workers in its absence. In fact he wanted to get back home on the next steamer. However, he was a celebrity

even in that small town. The news of his arrival spread like wild fire. People turned up in throngs to meet him. There were invitations gallore for dinners and teas. They also persuaded him to give a talk.

"The people are dying to listen to a good speech," they commented. He acquiesced.

The first talk was tremendously successful. He spoke of Gandhiji's philosophy of nonviolence and noncooperation and socialism as the answer for all their problems. People clapped and roared and wanted more even though it was not the regular political stuff. The audience comprised of people from the villages nearby too. These implored Bapu to give a talk in their village. Bapu, heartened by the overwhelming response, was quick to comply. But he did not undertake the management of the centre. He felt that he was not authorized to do so.

His talks achieved the goal, that of stimulating an awakening. The people got into the mood of the Dandi March. The leaders had decided to organize a Satyagraha at Shiroda from the 12th of May to the 22nd. On the 11th, five hundred volunteers came down to Shiroda to participate in the Satyagraha. They visited various salt pans in smaller groups and shouted slogans against the unjust British law. The police caned them and took a hundred and fifty or so into custody. On the 15th of May Bapu himself led a group to a salt pan. The police put him in handcuffs and kept him by their side. They didn't harass him in any way. But they made a lathi charge on the volunteers. Bapu pleaded to be set free and was thrashed too. But they wouldn't do it. Such were the orders, custody for the leaders and severe drubbing for the volunteers.

Many volunteers got severely wounded and collapsed. The sight of them dripping with blood, and moaning and writhing in pain infuriated others. They attacked the police. It was a war! Bapu had full sympathy with the rioters. Yet he felt that they had totally disregarded Gandhiji's principle of nonviolence. In his own way he tried to get them back on line. But he just couldn't. That lathi charge had changed the mood of the people. They talked of attacking the British and shedding blood to attain freedom. Bapu was frustrated.

And now the letter came. The leaders of the Maharashtra Satyagraha Mandal had written it from prison. This probably had delayed it.

"Your work at Shiroda has been extremely laudable. Hence the Maharashtra Satyagraha Mandal is very happy to entrust absolute authority to you and to appoint you as the chief officer of the Mandal

at Shiroda," it said. But Bapu turned down the offer. He could see that the aggravated mood of the people was going to last for quite some time and that his speeches would be absolutely ineffective to knock the principles of nonviolence in their minds. He was not carved out to be a political leader at all. He wanted to play missionary to Gandhiji's dictates, indoctrinate everybody in the precepts of nonviolence. He returned to Pune, his off and on home.

Still he was jailed for these activities and spent more than six months at the Thane jail. Dr. Woods who had been in constant touch with him, was deeply disturbed. He sent Manik hundred dollars to provide Bapu with whatever was needed to make his stay comfortable.

On the 30th of March, 1931, he was released as per a decision of the Bombay High Court. He visited Harvard soon after and returned in October, 1932 via Leningrad. The trip to Leningrad was intended only to meet his erstwhile friends there.

Back home Bapu had no intention of finding regular work, paid or unpaid. So far as he was concerned he was through with family responsibilities. Their weight had been pressing on his mind ever since that hot and humid day in May 1891 when he was engaged to Bala against his wishes. Sometimes he had buried them, sometimes he had placed them on the back burner and sometimes he had fulfilled them to the best of his ability and opinion. Now he declared them as having been fulfilled once and for all and disencumbered himself from this cringing tie. He had left enough money for Baba to complete his education. Manik had not only been married, Dr. Prasad had taken over all his responsibilities. Manu had graduated in biology. She should find a teaching job somewhere, Bapu recommended. Marriage was the last recommendation for anybody's life in his mind. But Manu longed to have a home and family and nothing else. She had wanted to be a doctor, a dream given to them all by Dada, but picked up only by Manu. However, Dr. Prasad had talked her out of it.

"Fine. But would you practise the profession? Didn't you always say that you wanted to be a homemaker?"

"I did. I still do."

"In that case think twice before you take up that course. There are a couple of doctor ladies in my family who cannot find husbands because they are too highly educated and have to spend long hours away from home."

Manu had quickly changed her plans to a degree in biology. She did not want a career that would clash with homemaking. Sometimes

she did go to Pune, supposedly their home, in her vacation. But such fleeting trips failed to give her the satisfaction of having a home. Her love for a home bordered on a maniac obsession. Bereft of both, a home and a job, she had no space to call her own. If only Bapu knew that he was giving his kids some unusual personality disorders in his endeavour to satisfy his drives for spirituality and a meaningful life! Despite the luxurious life style given to them all by Dr. Prasad for Manu this too was sheer torture, for in some way her life was still being shaped by others, she still did not have a say in it. In later life all this repression would make her worse than a behemoth; she would become a tyrant and a matriarch in her own family. She would insist on shaping everybody's life as per her own desire and convenience and in the process lose many good friends.

Kamlu too never took roots in the Prasad household. She had not taken roots even at Chikhali. Even though she had been given immense love by many in the heterogeneous household of the Lauds, she had no experience of family ties or any other ties of an emotional nature. Her life so far had been a parade of people who had been in and out of her life. She had been sticking it out ever since she came to have thoughts and feelings. But her intended measure to end her homelessness was not marriage. A home had no place in her thoughts. She just craved to go to the U.S.A. and study there, be with herself and stop the parade. Her patience was infinite. Never once had she complained about her varying placements during school days and vacations. In her heart she probably knew that complaints would be absolutely useless. Anyway, as a child, she never had any alternate plans. But once she graduated, then oh boy! She would put her foot down for an American education and they better come through or face hell! Like Baba she was extraordinary in her studies. At twelve she was in the eighth. At fourteen she would clear matric, a record that would go unlauded and add up to her bitterness.

Bala too was constantly at Bangalore. She looked after Manik's household and kids so the latter could enjoy parties and go on tours with Dr. Prasad whenever possible. This was an excellent state of affairs so far as Bapu was concerned. It gave him the freedom he had always sought for from responsibilities. Henceforth he would spend his days in travelling, reading, writing and lecturing and still bask in the satisfaction of having fulfilled all his mundane duties. Whatever little money he received for his books or lectures he passed on to Bala.

Baba graduated with mathematics as major and physics as his

second subject. He took up professorship at Aligarh. He had been doing research in both the subjects while at Harvard and he continued it. The joys this brought compensated for the monotony of a banal teaching job. Like Babu he kept up a massive correspondence with his friends around the world. He was in annual demand in the marriage market. Parents of many girls had their eyes on him, tall, fair, handsome, incredibly intelligent and brimming with fitness. Most of the proposals had been from the Saraswat Brahmin families settled at Pune. But some had been from other communities too. By now Manik had characteristically a vast friends circle amidst the Aiyangars at Bangalore. She received a few proposals from the parents of goodlooking, well educated girls. Kakasaheb Kalelkar had been seeking to unite the Maharashtrian and Gujarati communities in a marriage alliance. Later on he would marry all his sons to Gujarati girls for this particular reform. He extended a few proposals on behalf of some Gujarati families. And so on. But finally it was Balwantrao Madgaonkar, Babu's friend for years, who won. He had four sons and only one daughter. Nalini, who was the apple of his eye. She was fair like a European and very goodlooking and smart. A graduate of the Karve University she spoke English fluently. She was exceedingly talented in sewing and embroidery. She had received many prizes for her samples.

"Babu! What do you think of Nalini as a wife for Baba? Balwantrao queried.

"She is too good. However I do not want to pressurize Baba in anyway. You can ask him directly. Let him have a few meetings with Nalini. He will not take a look at her over a cup of tea and say yes. As you know he has spent most of his formative years in U.S.A," Babu answered. And that was that. He had given an opinion and washed his hands off the matter. By consensus of opinion Manik now took over. Baba was known for his unpredictable behaviour. If at all Baba took up stance against marriage or proved to be difficult in other ways, there was a faint possibility that Manik could argue with him and make him see light

"We are avant-gardes too," Balwantrao had asserted and it was true. He agreed that Baba should take Nalini out a few times and form an opinion.

"Baba! Think well carefully and then say yes. You may take her out. All of us like her. All the same we do not want to impose upon you," Manik said to Baba after she had a talk with him.

"That is nice to know!" Baba snapped. He never let anything pass

without coming up with an amusing retort. However, he tendered no objections to the proposal.

They were all thankful that he had not said no to marriage. He was probably lonely at Aligarh and dying to have the comforts of a home. Nobody knew. Baba's inner thoughts were a sealed coffer.

Baba stayed at Mumbai and had several meetings with Nalini. In a week's time his mind was made up in favour of the marriage. But he would communicate his answer only in his special style.

"Baba! Have you come to a conclusion?" Manik asked him after the week's deadline that she had given him was over.

"There is never any conclusion in research or literature or even in life. Everything just flows on."

"Now don't you be flippant, Baba! You have all the freedom in the world to make up your mind. We do not want you to marry the first girl that you have seen. Babu too does not want to be apportioned blame for having pressurized you in any way."

"Having pressurized me at other points in my life.."

"Now don't you begin all that. That is water under the bridge. From your answers I conclude that you want to marry Nalini."

"So? You read my mind better than I do it myself?"

"I don't claim to. That is why I am asking you."

"Asking for what?" Baba was really in an irritating, playful mood.

"Baba! Manik yelled.

"Well, you said think carefully and then say yes. If all I have to say is yes, I don't see any point in thinking. Ha! Ha! Ha!"

"I can read an affirmative in those guffaws in bold and capitals."

Baba couldn't come up with any more teasing remarks. He had really liked Nalini and yes it was.

"Aai! Now you have to live with me. Remember I always said I would give you a home when I had one? The time has come now."

"Who will look after Usha and Arun? Manik needs help."

"She will keep an ayah, two ayahs, for one is there already."

"Why should she? Manu and I are there," Kamlu retorted. Taciturn though she was, on the few occasions when she opened her mouth she could be exceedingly hurtful.

Anyway that was that, the wedding of the year, celebrated amidst subdued pomp and grandeur and exquisite ambience.

TWENTY FIVE

1933

Dr. Prasad was a member of the downtown club and took his family there unfailingly every evening. Usha had passed away, an in sufferable tragedy, but little Sheila had been added to the family. Bala and Manu too loved to go to the club and Kamlu joined them whenever she was at Bangalore. This was an expensive hobby. But Dr. Prasad did not mind. He had promised this kind of life style to Manik and he kept the promise. Both he and Manik were kindhearted and expansive. They willingly carted all members of their family there.

Many Maharashtrians had jobs at Bangalore or were studying at one of the wellknown institutes. Manu was acquainted with most of them. Sometimes she played bridge with a group of students. She was twenty three and tiny, but slim and straight. She wore a nine yard sari and tied her long and curly hair into a plaited bun. She was smart and fluent in English. She wanted to get married, but the topic was not even on cards.

"Don't worry. At some point Daddykaka will do the needful," Kamlu commented Manik's kids called Dr. Prasad, Daddy and that name had been picked up by the others.

"I don't want to marry an Aiyangar. I cannot live on sambar and kolumboo."

"What else are we doing right now?"

"That is different. This is but a temporary arrangement. Tai does buy fish whenever it is available. What I mean is... I don't know what I mean." Manu just wanted a home. She had no ideas about the kind of man she wanted to marry.

"Why not have a job and earn some money?"

"I don't want to. Not right now anyway. I might work after marriage."

"We are working, you know, as ayahs for Arun and Sheela. Is it not better to have a properly paid job than this one? In your place I would have a job and my own independent life." Kamlu, fairer and shorter than Manu had just joined college at Bangalore. She spoke in a very soft, almost inaudible tone. But her remarks were ruthless. She interpreted life in terms of repression and freedom. She had no concept

of the kind of give and take involved in softer feelings. In no way were these two harassed in the Prasad household. Yet the awareness that it was not their home had left a bitter taste in their mouths. Bapu's renunciation-oriented life style was playing havoc with his children's minds.

"That too is a temporary arrangement."

"It is not upto Bapu to find you a husband. But he will find you a good job."

"I am telling you that I don't want to have a job, Still you are singing the same tune." Manu got irritated very quickly.

Trimbak Ramchandra Sathe, a student of the Koknastha Chitpavan community was studying at the All India Institute of Sciences. He was thirty one, very fair pleasant and smart. Manu liked him. His father Ramchandra Abaji Sathe was a government pleader at Nasik. He had three siblings, Mathura Pawaskar, Prabhakar alias Raja and Indu Bhawe. Ramchandra Sathe was an avant-garde and a reformist. He was always dressed in trousers, long coat and a pagree. After the death of his first wife Venutai he had married a child widow Janaki Namjoshi at the behest of the Karve Institute, Hingne, who was teaching the three Rs to the other child widows that came there. She had continued her social work at Nasik too.

Trimbak's pet name was Nana.

"Aai! I want to get married to Nana Sathe," One fine morning Manu informed Bala. Bala blew up. At thirty one Sathe was jobless and in her eyes, unfit to take on the responsibilities of marriage. Also by now her standards for the qualifications of her daughters' husbands had become far too high, they had to be at least electrical engineers from Harvard like Dr. Prasad, if not doctors.

"Manu! Sathe doesn't even have a job," She roared.

"He will, after he completes his education. He is completing it very soon. If he doesn't earn enough I will have a job," Manu answered. She was far from bashful. She had fallen in love with Sathe and was in a hurry to walk out of the Prasad household and the Kosambi family. She didn't care what hardships she would have to face in achieving her well defined goals. Like her father and brother she was sturdy and adventurous enough not to care for odds.

"You don't want to have a job!"

"I don't want to have one right now for myself. But I would be gladly having one for my family, my own family."

"This is easily said than done. Do you realise that the Sathes are

vegetarian Brahmins? You say that you cannot live without fish."

"I cannot. But then Nana does not have any objection to that. He happily eats nonvegetarian food."

"Will he be able to take you to clubs? Will he afford a car?"

"I don't care."

"Yet you go to the club every day."

"I go because Daddykaka takes me. What will I do at home here? In my own home I would have plenty to do."

Pretty soon Manik and Dr. Prasad too joined Bala in tendering objections to the intended match.

"I don't think this is a good idea, Manu! We will find you a good boy, don't worry," they said.

"You didn't so far! There was no talk of getting me married! You didn't introduce me to a single boy. And now that I have found somebody you are just objecting to him," Manu continued to argue.

"Wow! Who would have imagined that Manu was such a tough nut?" Bala vented her disapproval.

"Because she is not concerned with anything other than education," Manik analysed.

"But I am. Isn't there such a thing as equality of sons-in-law? How will it be if my one son-in-law is foreign educated and another plain?"

"Don't be a snob, Aai! Nana too is very highly educated. Anyway Manu is very firm in wanting to marry him. We should not pose any more objections."

Manu and Nana got married in a hall at Bangalore. They got the Registrar over and signed on the dotted line in the presence of their families. Nana had become an atheist. He did not believe in idol worship or any kind of ritual. Both Bapu and Bhau made it a point to remain present at the wedding. Most of the Maharashtrians residing at Bangalore attended the tea party that followed. Mangu represented the crowd at Chikhali. Baba and Nalutai too came over from Aligarh.

Baba was about to join the Fergusson College. He wanted to be at Pune and continue his studies of Sanskrit and take on the editing of manuscripts eventually. Bapu approved of this wholeheartedly. A new institute named the Bhandarkar Oriental Institute of Research had been founded at Pune with the joint efforts of Dr. Bhandarkar and some of his friends interested in Indology. The institute had a vast library and a good staff of Shastris who translated Sanskrit works and taught Sanskrit

grammar in Sanskrit. Baba desired to take advantage of these facilities.

Bapu's house next to Dr. Bhandarkar's was too far from the Bhandarkar Institute as well as the Fergusson College. Even though Baba had bought a car now, he wasted a lot of time reaching these places. For his multitudinous activities time was far more precious than money. So Bapu sold his house and began to build a new one for Baba on Bhandarkar Road. He got fourteen thousand for it. Out of that money he gave some to Bala to be used for Manu's wedding. Bala made a beautiful belt of gold, bangles and earrings. Bhau had given a thick gold necklace weighing twelve tolas. The belt was very fashionable at Bangalore and Bala just loved it.

Bapu personally supervised the work of the new house intended for Baba. Both father and son loved ancient Indian culture. Naturally they had come up with a traditional plan for the house a central courtyard and rooms all around it. The plot was huge because Baba and Nalutai were both interested in gardening. The house had two bathrooms and a study. The garden was an exquisite melange of Western flowers like magnolia, a wonderful variety of roses, and fruits like the grapefruit plus many Indian varieties like jasmine, bakul, karvand, jackfruit etc. Henceforth this was going to be Baba's house, not Bapu's house.

"Good!" Bala exclaimed with simulated insouciance. "Bapu always wanted to give it away to charity. He never thought of it as my property. It is everybody's good luck that at least Baba got it."

After the wedding Bala and Bapu went over to Sankhwal and thence to Chikhali. Bala had wanted to take Manu and Nana too. But Nana had found a job at Neera and they had gone there. Anyway Nana had vented a frank objection to the suggestion when he heard that there was no plumbing at Chikhali.

At Chikhali Bapu had some unfinished business. After the death of Kashba and Pachubai the house at Chikhali and the lands that they owned there had been registered as per the Portuguese law in the name of all their children. Portuguese law apportioned property equally amongst all the living children, sons as well as daughters. Of these heirs Dada and Bappa were childless. Nobody was going to count Martul as heir to the Land property for obvious reasons. Dada had always known this. Hence he had registered his house at Mhapsa as Magha's. Martul would get it after Magha. Jagu and his wife had passed away. That left the two daughters and their children, the three Shiveshwarkar boys and Bala's three daughters and a son. Of the three Shiveshwarkar sons one had died and one had left home and settled at

Ujjain. He had cut off all contact with the family. That had left only Motha Baba who was married now and had a four year old daughter, Nandu and a newly born son Sharad. The family lived in a chawl at Grant Road, Mumbai.

"I want Bala to sign a paper giving up her share in the Laud property. I want her name removed from the registration," Bapu said to Bappa.

Bala was dazed. Bapu had suddenly flashed this surprise on her. Never before had he given her an inkling of the thought in his mind. Once again instinct warned her that nothing was going to change his mind. Still she couldn't give up without arguing. "I agree that the girls should not get anything. They will be looked after by their husbands. Kamlu wants to have a job, but Baba could definitely use the property or the income from it for his research and travels. He travels. He has a salary of a hundred and fifty rupees only. It is not adequate for all his interests," She pleaded.

"Bala! Greed is wrong. Baba is well qualified to look after himself and his family. He is not money hungry. Scientists and research scholars do not chase money. Baba is no different. His heart is not in this property at all."

"But we do not want to cut him off like that! He too grew up here. He is like our son. We do want him to have something," Bappa pleaded.

"But it is not going to work. Baba does not even want to visit Chikhali because he has shed the habit of doing without plumbing. He is not going to raise any income out of the lands and it is not right to use income made by others. He himself will say so for he is a confirmed Marxist. Motha Baba comes here regularly and helps look after the land and whatever. It is right that his kids enjoy the property." As usual Bapu had the final say in the matter.

The Kosambi kids never felt dissatisfied with this arrangement. Manik had been sending money regularly, and visiting her uncles to tide them over the difficult period in their life. Manu was perfectly happy with Nana. The latter soon found a job at I.C.I., Mumbai. Five years later he was sent to Indore as manager of the branch there. Manu was very happy to meet many of her old friends and teachers. She too kept sending money orders to her uncles.

TWENTY SIX

1936-1943

In 1936 Kamlu graduated with flying colours. She was only eighteen. She had applied to Vassar and had been given admission and a scholarship too. She only needed money for the passage to make it there. The snag was that Bala had no money. Bapu sent her small sums infrequently. But she spent these on her travels and aid to her brothers at Chikhali. Bapu had been staying at the premises of the Banaras Hindu University and then at the campus of the Kashi University ever since Baba's house got ready. He loved to teach the locals and foreigners who were interested in Pali. He had also written a book *Hindi Sanskriti Anil Ahimsa* and was supervising its publication. This time he was not accepting any salary for his teaching job nor any royalty for his books.

The three hundred thirty two pages work represented a very important stage in his life. The books that he had written so far were mainly translations. Now for the first time he had attempted a historical analysis of Indian culture and in particular, the development and spread of the tenet of nonviolence. He would start with the outcome of his vast reading and intensive thinking. It was the first work of its sort, one that had such a massive and scholarly sweep.

"I have no money," Bala snapped when Kamlu advanced her demand. The letter from Vassar was a cause for happiness. But Kamlu remained untouched by elation for she feared she was not going to make it there for lack of money. She was not very effervescent by nature in any case.

"Surely you do!" Kamlu snapped back. She had been preparing herself for a war too. "You had some for Manu's wedding. Money for the passage is all that I am asking."

"Don't you know that Bapu has refused to accept a salary? Isn't Manik doing enough for you all? Hasn't she given saris, blouses, books, college fees? Do you think I have the gumption to ask her for your passage to America?"

"Write to Bapu. He gave an American education to Tai and Baba. He gave jewellery to Manu. What about me? What does he have in mind for me?"

"Twenty rupees per month till you are eighteen. And you are eighteen now. You write to him if you so wish." Bala too was livid.

"I am going to. But I thought you might be able to plead my case better."

"Well, you thought wrong! He never conceded anything to me. I am the last person who should be charged with inveigling some favour out of the man from Sun. He had but one answer for me: do within whatever you have."

"But in this case I can't swim to Boston!"

"Then beg. I begged. I got money out of the Bhandarkars and the Madgaonkars and brought you up. There is a limit to how much Manik could do for you. She got Manu over for Kunda's birth of her own accord. I didn't ask her to do this. Anna always gives me something whenever he turns up to meet me. The Madgaonkars are the parents of my daughter-in-law now. It would not be right to touch them for money."

"Nobody helped me for the application. Nobody helped me with anything. I just made myself. Now the passage money is the only thing that I am asking for. Is it too much?"

"It is, under the circumstances."

"Shouldn't Bapu help me change my circumstances? Should I be an ayah for Arun and Sheela?"

"Don't speak profanities. This is not true."

"Bapu paid for Tai's education till she was twenty three and for Baba's till he was nineteen and for his passages too."

"Baba is a son."

"Am I a bonded labour? Am I from garbage?"

"Reserve all your queries for your father. I am totally helpless in the matter."

Kamlu could see that this was correct. She wrote to Bapu, her first letter to him, asking for the money for her passage. Bapu promptly wrote back saying that he did not have money anymore, that he had discarded the role of money from his life altogether.

Kamlu wrote one more terse letter asking him to find money or a scholarship for her from the rich industrialists that he was friendly with. She particularly suggested Jugalkishor Birla who was known to be a charitable person. He had built Buddhist rest houses and viharas at Kushinara, Sarnath, Darjeeling, Banaras and many other places. Unrelented, Bapu explained on a postcard that he did not deem it right to appeal to his friends for any personal matter. Livid but undaunted Kamlu wrote to all his siblings asking them to give the money as a gift

or a loan.

"Bapu provided you with a good education. Now he has become a monk or a sanyasi or whatever. He does not have any money for my education. I need money only for my passage. I feel that you should pay back whatever he spent on you by giving me this money and helping me to go to Vassar."

But these letters too didn't get anywhere. Baba and Nana wrote back that they couldn't afford to do this. Manik said she was doing enough.

Finally Kamlu worked at the Karve University for a year and raised money for her passage.

Bapu received a lot of flak, justifiably so, from Kamlu over this episode. It could be earmarked as the beginning of an era of the flak in his life.

The year Kamlu sailed for the U.S.A Bapu took up residence at Mumbai and began to build his Bahujana Vihara, a vihora for the workers, the mill workers mainly. Jugalkishor Birla had sponsored the project on the condition that Bapu himself supervise the work. The project represented a culmination of Bapu's devotion to Buddhism and his interest in improving the plight of the masses. The site chosen was in the quarter of the mill-workers popularly known as Girangaon, the cotton mill city, a very crowded part of Mumbai. The vihora would furnish the workers with a nice and quiet place for discussions and gettogethers. That is why he had named it Bahujana Vihara. It was socialism in an old style Buddhist temple.

The vihora got completed in a year. It is still there. A place embedded, in its wall informs the visitors that Jugalkishor Birla gave 19,000 rupees for its construction, S.D. Prabhavalkar built the stupa, M/s. Raval & Co. provided tiles gratis, A.B. Pandit gave all the furniture gratis and M/s Kora and Bhat Engineers did not charge any money for the plans. Bapu's name is nowhere there, by his own insistence.

Bapu was immensely attached to his Bahujana Vihara. He had a small cell here wherein he read, wrote and meditated. He wore a scant khaddar dhoti and a sleeveless vest and wooden *khadas*, soles with a knob to be inserted in between the big toe and the next one for gripping. He taught whomsoever wished to learn Pali.

He found many students amidst the Nav-Bauddhas. On sundays he gave sermons about a Buddhist or socialistic topic, equality, education, unions and freedom. Workers and their children turned up here at all odd hours to discuss something or the other and he welcomed them with warm feelings. Unlike his son he never failed to be available to people.

Somehow this peaceful life style was suddenly buffeted by a storm. Bapu had incorporated his opinions about nonviolence in the *Gita* in his latest landmark work *Hindi Sanskriti Ani Ahimsa*. He had eulogized Krishna as a great Hindu leader who too had recommended nonviolence. But had not failed to point out that he had sanctioned a war. The statement had antagonized the Hindus even though it had been historically correct. Somebody reported that Birla, who was a devout Hindu, had been infuriated by these antagonistic remarks. Bapu was quick to wind up his activities at the Vihara and move to Sarnath. Both Birla and Gandhiji tried to persuade Bapu to keep on his sermons which were achieving exquisite awakening amidst the workers. But Bapu saw no reason to change his decision. Besides, he could never stay in one place for long.

More or less the same story was repeated at Sarnath. The monks as Sarnath were in close contact with Bapu. They had been inviting him to stay with them and even built separate room for him. Bapu took up the offer now. But soon fell out with them over their system of hoarding money. Sarnath was by now a very well known Buddhist place of pilgrimage. The Buddha had addressed his first sermon here to his first five disciples. A stupa built here by Ashoka represented the small beginning point of the religion which later on grew to amazing worldwide proportions. Many visitors and patrons donated large sums of money for the maintenance of the stupa and the monks who resided there. The money was deposited in a bank and used whenever required. Bapu called this hoarding. Characteristically he was quick and frank to point out that the Buddha's dictates had been to the contrary. He had asked the monks to raise money as and when required and to spend it immediately for that specific purpose. Bapu objected to this system of acquiring a regular flow of gifts and saving them in a bank. He did not see why the commandment laid down by the Master needed to be disobeyed. The monks agreed in principle. But they pointed out that raising money as and when required was a longdrawn process which would not achieve good results. This was their way of making amendments to suit reality. However, Bapu did not have the same perspective. He therefore, walked out of Sarnath.

Buddhist literature made a reference to an infection of dysentery that the Buddha had caught from a morsel of boar meat that he had received in his begging bowl. The Buddha had died of this infection. He had always said that a monk should eat whatever he got and from anyone. He had particularly instructed the monks not to distinguish between food given by high caste and low caste people while going out

for begging. From this perspective the fact that he inadvertently broke his vow of vegetarianism does not seem to be very grave. It was just one of those things that happened. Nevertheless many people, particularly those who wanted to undermine the Buddha's greatness in some way, had made a major issue out of this episode candidly reported by his disciples. Bapu was very touchy about this and always rushed in for his defense.

As early as 1913 he had waged a war with another wellknown scholar. Dr. Shridhar Vyankatesh Ketkar. Ketkar had written a series of articles in *Kesari* about casteism. He had stated that the Buddha had added to distinctions of castes instead of doing away with them and that he had died because he relished boar's meat. These were infuriating statements, more so because they were inauthentic, the Buddha had not worsened the caste scene nor had he relished an allegedly favourite food.

For the first time in his life Bapu lost his temper. He wrote an acerbic answer cavilling Ketkar personally. He stated that Ketkar had based his conclusions on the biased and halfbaked ideas of some Western scholars. He had also challenged the latter to prove the authenticity of his statements. Ketkar, who enjoyed wars, hit back with more personal stuff. Bapu kept the war up for a few days, but gave up soon. He always considered this as a black event in his life.

But now something similar happened again. Apparently some Jain scholars had pointed out to him that in the ancient times meat was permissible amidst the Jain monks. They had even brought to his notice the exact verse from the *Acharanga Sutra* where in the supposedly historical truth was contained. Bapu wrote a paper about this custom which got published in the quarterly house magazine of the Purattva Mandir. The article escaped public notice at the time. A few Jain swamis did express disapproval, but a few others were equally quick to admit that the article contained nothing but the truth.

In 1941 Bapu published *Bhagwan Buddha*. He incorporated the article in it. Now it drew everybody's attention. A storm raged. Bapu was asked to retract the statement and apologize for it. He even received threat to end his life. But he remained steadfast. He challenged anybody to prove that historically his statement was incorrect. He suggested an arbitrator for the matter.

"Religion is one thing and history another. There can be no compromise so far as historical truths are concerned," he opined.

The war raged for four years, then fizzled out.

TWENTY SEVEN

1945 - 4th June 1947

Bapu was tremendously interested in Jainism including its gospel of voluntary death, Sallekhan. Actually this is far more than voluntary death. It is the jettisoning of the body by an enlightened mind after the body's work got done with. Parshwanath, the propounder of Jainism had gone in for this ultimate vow of a monk's life. Bapu had written a book *Parshwanathacha Chaturyama Dharma* and explained and justified Sallekhan as the final phase of a man's spirituality.

"If the practice of this vow of Sallekhan became very common, the society would benefit inordinately. If the old and the incurably diseased fasted to death voluntarily, the burden on society would be considerably minimized," he had stated.

Thoughts of following this dictate had been gripping his mind for some years.

These were not entwined with the least trace of despondency. He was experiencing a kind of repleteness. He had nothing more to achieve, nor did he have the strength in his body to accomplish anything worthwhile anymore. So Sallekhan it had to be, he argued to himself. His usual self-examination revealed that his thoughts were hardening beautifully into a sustained resoluteness and that they were bereft of the suicidal frenzies he had been experiencing earlier whenever he had reached an impasse due to inability to achieve his goals. Once in Burma he had even held a bottle of poisonous medicine in his hands and wanted to drink it. But had elicited himself out of the melancholia and thrown it out of the window. His mental state in 1944 was far from suicidal.

In 1945 he took up residence at Gandhiji's ashrama near Dohari Ghat in the Gorakhpur Zilla, Uttar Pradesh. Then began to fast. He had specially chosen this isolated place for his final departure for he disliked the fanfare that the vow had been generating elsewhere. Baba Raghavdas, who was the chief of the ashrama was panic stricken. He wrote to Gandhiji at Noakhali and the Jain scholar Becharadas Joshi at Ahmedabad, and requested them to intervene in the matter and halt the impending disaster. Joshi sent telegrams to others and to Bapu too. The ashrama soon got overflowed with stacks and stacks of telegrams all imploring

Bapu to give up the idea. Gandhiji wrote back immediately to say that the fast should be stopped forthwith and Bapu moved to Sevagram for the treatment of whatever ailments were bothering him.

The ailments were not fatal. All the same they were extremely irritating. Bapu suffered from an incurable itch and some skin infections. His digestive system had always been very weak. Now there were very few things that he could eat without getting into severe problems. He was diabetic too. But that didn't bother him for he had been keeping away from sweets and fried food. Basically his major complaint was the onset of old age. He was sixty-eight in 1945. The hardships that he had willingly forced himself through had aged him beyond these years. Also he had lost his enthusiasm for teaching and writing. This not only irritated him, it convinced him that his role on this earth was over, that there was no more strength in his body and mind to achieve anything. His always had been a purpose-driven life and he just couldn't live a lethargic and aimless one. So he had to end it.

Still he was quick to end his fast, in absolute obedience to Gandhiji's orders. He moved to Sevagram. But continued to travel sparingly to other places. He was on the advisory boards of many institutions, but he had stopped teaching. The thought stayed with him for two years and then reached a head in 1947. He made up his mind to go for Sallekhan and go with everyone's blessings this time to avert the kind of disaster he had to face in 1945.

The year brought two good news. But even these could not effect a change in Bapu's decision. His mind was already made up, gone beyond the influence of good or bad. The Second World War was over. The British had decided to hand over power to the Indians on the fifteenth of August. They had also insisted on Partition and the Congress had to acquiesce. This was bad news for Bapu, but he was not going to wait and watch endlessly. The second good news was about Kamlu. She had done a doctorate in child psychology. She wanted to return, but had been unable to leave the U.S.A due to the conditions of war. Now the war was over. But she had met Dr. P.V. Bhoota, a bright and handsome engineer from M.I.T. and got married to him. He had been made the Managing Director of Dorr & Oliver, India, a very high post. The couple was awaiting the orders to proceed to India. Bapu was happy for her, yet in no frame of mind to postpone his plan in order to meet her.

In January he visited Bangalore. Bala was there with Arun and Sheela. Dr. Prasad had found a new job at Mumbai. He and Manik

lived in a luxurious flat at Marine Drive. Bala looked after the kids and their house at Bangalore. During the kids' vacations they all travelled to Mumbai. Arun was in the engineering college. Manik and Dr. Prasad had intended to send him to M.I.T. for further studies. Sheela was doing B.Sc.

Bapu looked graver than usual. But Bala never suspected the real cause of the graveness. It could be anything, a new book, a new project, whatever. On the second day of his arrival he suddenly erupted into an apology:

"Bala! I never did anything for your happiness! You have to forgive me for this lapse," he said.

Bala was touched and ready to break down. This was the first time in known history that Bapu had shown concern for her feelings. She was quick to control herself, putting it down as just one of those things.

"I was not unhappy! My life was good. All our kids turned out to be good and brilliant. Baba turned out to be outstanding. He gets invited to many universities the world over. Some mathematical theorems have got his name on them. He immortalized the Kosambis. You too."

"Yes, all my kids and sons-in-law and Nalutai. Everybody has been good and brilliant as you say. Still the fact remains that I did not perform my worldly duty towards them."

"You were not supposed to. You have a spiritual bend of mind. You are far above mundane matters. Don't you brood over such matters anymore. Because you did not fawn over them, they made themselves. Actually you should have been married to a spiritual-minded girl. But you got me! The irony of fate! You got saddled with a selfish and mundane woman like me!"

"Don't you say that! I have no complaints about you. Because you came into life I could do some justice to my mundane responsibilities."

"If you really feel like this why don't you come here for good after you go through that intended treatment at Sevagram?"

Bapu nodded, knowing that this was not going to happen, that this was their last meeting. He left most of his clothes and other stuff at Bangalore when he left. This was strange for he had few clothes in the first place. He never bought more than he required. But Bala believed that this confirmed his intention of coming back and settling at Bangalore. She really longed to look after him.

Gandhiji had left instructions for Bapu's treatment. Around four

or five doctors treated him for more than three months. But his health did not improve. Soon he reached a stage when he couldn't digest even plain water.

There was an endless stream of friends at the Sevagram turning up to meet Bapu. Bapu had lost weight, he was alarmingly skeletal. He discussed Sallekhan freely with everybody and implored them all to seek Gandhiji's permission for this plan. Kakasaheb Kalelkar was a frequent visitor.

"My body is bereft of all strength now. I came over because Gandhiji ordered me to do so. You are all giving me a lot of love and doing me many favours too. How long should I accept this burden of your good deeds? I get tormented by the thought of this burden. God has willed that my body cannot achieve anything anymore. So why should I cling to it? Understand these circumstances and give me the permission to leave this world," he said to one and all round the clock.

Finally they all had to acquiesce. They could see that he was really very resolute. They too believed in the philosophy of Sallekhan. Balwantsinhaji, the head of the ashrama, wrote to Gandhiji. The latter was in Noakhali again to pacify the riots that had erupted there at the mention of the Partition of India. Still he found the time to write back.

"If Kaushambi cannot digest food, let him live on water. If he cannot drink even water, then death is inevitable. More than anything else internal tranquility is important. Still consult Vinoba and follow his instructions."

Earlier Vinobaji had given instructions for a special diet. Now he had no more instructions. He gave tacit permission to Bapu's intended plan. When Kamalnayan Bajaj came to see Bapu. He broke down completely knowing this was to be their last meeting. Bapu too was overcome. Everyone was in tears. All those present were haunted by the scene. It was tragic yet magnanimously divine. Nobody had ever seen a man walk to Death with such grim and sustained determination.

Two weeks after he gave up food Bapu became so weak he couldn't sit up on the tiny cot he used for his bed. Still his mind was as bright as ever. He continued to talk about a variety of subjects intertwining them with quotations from all the languages that he was a master of. His main occupation was to remember and test details of Pranayama in the *Yogashastra*, particularly the final breath. To the last day of his life he would not stop being a preacher and a scholar and a yogi!

"Yoga is known to give a man the knowledge of anticipating his

final breath and to instruct him in cooperating with this last function of his body. Unfortunately I have not studied it so deeply and I am unable to identify and practise it," he used to remark.

The people around him as also the teaming visitors had given up imploring him to give up his intended Sallekhan. His children called him regularly on the phone. But his fast was kept a secret from them all. All those concerned agreed that if at this stage they tried to whisk him back to life it would be the worst of disasters emotionally and physically. His mind had transcended all emotion, sweet or sad. Joy, pleasure, pain, anxieties, nothing touched him. He himself noted it.

"I am experiencing an unusual inner tranquility. I think this is the fruition of my lifelong meditations. The inner strength of a man is tested at the moment of his death. If he has had some spiritual training (sadhana) he would leave his body experiencing such exquisite peace."

On the 22nd of May the team at the ashrama took him on a stretcher to a new well that had been dug on the premises and had it inaugurated by him. He had taken a keen interest in the project. After his death a plaque commemorating him was fitted to one of its walls. This is probably the only record of the great man's existence and work.

"In holy memory of Shri Dharmanand Kaushambi whose life was like pristine pure water and who took a short break from Death's presence, whom he had invited to be his guest by undertaking a fast on the 4th of May, to bless this well."

Gandhiji had always called him Kaushambiji and many had picked up that name.

He had also left instructions for the use of the one thousand rupees donated by Kamalnayan Bajaj. He wanted the money to be given to a student who was going to Sri Lanka to study Buddhism. Gandhiji had wondered in a letter why anyone should have to go to that country to study Buddhism.

"I would implore him to turn his mind away from such matters and turn it inwards. The soul might or might not leave the body. But concentration on inner feelings is important. Students could learn Pali in that country. But I do not believe that it is centre for the study of Buddhism. One does not understand the core of a religion by studying its language," Gandhiji had argued in his letter.

But Bapu, stubborn as ever, had not given up.

"If Kamalnayan Bajaj had not left one thousand rupees with me I would not have worried about such matters. Whatever came to my mind I wrote to you. However, I am not worrying a bit about it, I have

happily passed on all my burdens to you. I am extremely happy watching the sky at night. I interpret this as the outcome of your blessings. I have spent a year with the people there. During this period I could benefit by going over a few memories of the Buddha. I still get exulted when I think of those memories. I have forgotten everything else... Now the student who intends to go to Sri Lanka may not be a devotee. He would secure a degree here and go there for higher education. Still, it is our duty to see that he lives well there and so we should give him enough money to make a living." He wrote to Gandhiji on the 25th of May. Obviously the letter was dictated to somebody. He had been swept off his feet by Buddha's life story after reading it at the age of twenty one in an article published in *Balabodha*, a children's magazine. Inspired, he had spent a whole lifetime in hardships, adventures, intensive studies, spiritual training and the spread of the Master's gospels heedless of allegations of being impractical and lacking in interest in his family. He had lived life the way he wanted to live. And now even during these final moments of his life the love and devotion for the Buddha remained unabated as also his insistence on having his own way in matters he had mulled over and made up his mind for.

On the 3rd of June, Bapu asked Balwantsinhaji to spend the night in his room, something that he had never done before.

"It is possible that at midnight when the moon is in mid-sky death will come for me," he said, then reiterated all his instructions about his last rites, etc. His watch had to be given to his son. Everything else-there was very little but old dhotis- was to be distributed amongst the poor at the ashrama.

Balwantsinhaji stayed in his room keeping watch.

"I have never witnessed such ideal death in my life," he would write in his memoirs later on.

"I am not going tonight. Go to your room and sleep," Bapu said to him shortly after midnight.

The next morning, the 4th of June, Kakasaheb Kalelkar paid him a visit. At midday Bapu invited Balwantsinhaji to his room again.

"Now I am ready to go," he said. He kept talking in his usual style. Around two p.m. he asked that the doors of his room be left wide open.

"He had never made such a request before. If was like he had felt a presence in the room that had come to take him away and wanted to make matters easy for their departure together. His body began to relax. He stopped talking for the last ten minutes. Then we could sense

his last breath which never got exhaled. His death was as splendiferous as his life," is Balwantsinhaji's description of these touching final moments.

Bapu got cremated on a small mound nearby at five p.m. that same evening. The ceremony was attended by milling crowds. No family. This was family!

Gandhiji made a glowing mention of the Pali scholar in the course of his next sermon:

"We tend to eulogize people who pat their own backs. But do not even know those who have the mind of a servant, who give service to a religion. Acharya Kaushambi was such a person. He was a leading scholar of Buddhism and Pali. He was a recluse from choice. He was all prayers. May God will that we all follow him!"

Baba was informed of Bapu's death. But the others read about it only in the newspapers in the morning. They all dashed down to be with Bala who was inconsolable.

"He joined the Sun," Mangu commented. Everybody agreed.

"But left sparks with his children, grandchildren and disciples," Bala added.

Bala spent the next few years writing a cookery book. It was published by the Bhatkal Brothers.

She passed away in May 1955 and Manik joined her in November of that year.

THE BUDDHA'S RELIGION

Prince Siddhartha was born in an era of absolute liberalization of thinking in the prevailing social order. It was a reaction to Brahminism bordering on revolution, to the reigning prevalence of a rigid caste system and the preponderance of complex but meaningless rituals. Contemporary society has described this as a war between Dnyanakanda (knowledge) and Karmakanda (ritual).

The simple religion of the Vedas consisting of singing special prayers to a variety of deified natural phenomena had been replaced by Brahminism. The Brahmins kept their hold on society and religion by imposing a rigorous caste system wherein, by birth, they were the highest caste, and by monopolizing the interpretation of the ritual. Now there were a myriad individual thinkers as also gurus of vast ashramas and schools, who had turned their backs on the highly ritualistic Brahminism and imparted their own personal beliefs, and spiritual and intellectual findings to their disciples. These came from all the castes. They were mainly the writers of the Upanishads and Aranyakas, and the Shramanas, the wandering monks. The era earmarks the end of vacuous rituals and the advent of a simple religion and personal spiritual experience.

Already the Shramanas were preaching a very simple code of conduct to the people: control of the senses (Indriya-Nigraha), renunciation of property (Parigraha-Tyaga), purification of the self (Atmashuddhi), and nonviolence (Ahimsa). The writers of the Upanishads and the Aranyakas were more concerned with metaphysics than with the rules of conduct. They ruminated intensively about the nature and the origin of the Universe, the nature of God and Soul and their relationships with one another. However, there were no watertight compartments. Some Shramanas too had evolved their own metaphysical thought and some of the writers of the Upanishads have prescribed their own code of conduct. Pali literature records five Shramanas and their metaphysical viewpoints:

The Akriyawada of Purna Kashyapa, the theory of total passivism, whatever-is destined-to-happen-will happen; The Sansarshuddhiwada of Mankhaliputra Gosala, the theory that Moksha or a final release will be attained after orbiting through the cycle of birth, death and rebirth;

The Uchhedawada of Ajit Kesha-Kambali, the theory that the Universe is heading towards absolute destruction; the Shashwatwada of Pakudha Katyaya, the theory that only the earth, water, light (the sun), wind, pleasure, pain and the soul are eternal, everything else is perishable and the Chatuskoti-vinirmuktawada of Belatthiputra Sanjay. This last is a headspinning school of thought which categorizes the universe into four kinds of things: those that are, those that are not, those that seem to be but are not, and those that are and are not too.

The Buddha had his own thoughts on the code of conduct and the metaphysical thoughts. He refined the thoughts of the day, adding to it substantially from his own personal observances and spiritual experiences to come up with a fullfledged religion, Buddhism. He also spread it very diligently, wandering all over the country and giving sermons in a very simple style, making his disciples follow suit and put down his sermons in black and white. It would prove to be a social and metaphysical storm in India as well as the neighbouring countries.

The main feature of its potency was its simplicity and its preciseness. Nothing was left to its interpretation by others; everything had been preached by the Master himself and explained and commented on via illustrations picked up from daily life.

In the realm of metaphysics the Buddhist thinkers had considerable freedom within the framework provided by the Master. They participated very frequently in the philosophical symposiums held by kings and rich traders. They were a force to reckon with and their viewpoints have been respectfully refuted by Shankar, Ramanuja and other writers of the *Darshanas*, philosophical treatises of the Hindus. After Buddha the Buddhist metaphysical thoughts have been known to have existed together collectively they have been referred to as Baudhawada or the Baudha Darshana. The Baudhawada and Jainawada are called Nastika Darshanas because they do not believe in the existence of god. The six Hindu Darshanas are called the Astika Darshanas.

Two concepts are common to all these religions and philosophical systems: a faith in rebirth and a state of mind and soul where there is no body, no pain, no pleasure, but consciousness. The Buddha calls this Nirvana. Moksha is one of the Hindu names for it. There are many other names.

On the full noon day in the month of Vaishakha the Buddha got enlightened at Buddhagaya. He got enlightenment in the four divine truths (Aryasatya). These are: sorrow (Dukkha), greed (Trishna),

eradication of sorrow (Dukkha-Nirodha) and the way to this eradication (Dukkhanirodha-Marga). In other words, the Buddha realised that sorrow was a part of life, but there is definitely a way to its eradication; namely renunciation of greed.

At Sarnath the Buddha gave his maiden sermon to his five disciples and thence the number of his followers grew to incredible proportions.

The Buddha has recommended three achievements for the eradication of sorrow, positive moral thought and personal spiritual experience. These are:

1. Good Conduct (Sheel) 2. Meditation (Samadhi) 3. A Fine Intellect (Pradnya).

Good Conduct: For householders there are five golden rules of good moral conduct: abstinence from killing, theft, craftiness, having relationships with other men's wives and drinking. For the monks five more have been added: renunciation of all embellishments like garlands and *tilak*, that of a raised bed, that of festivities like dance and music, bar on the acceptance of gold, silver and money and on selling and purchasing. The fourth commandment, that of avoiding relationships with other men's wives has been replaced for the monks with one of strict celibacy. Many more stringent rules have been prescribed for the monks. Of these the most important is that they should live in a Sangha (Religious Order) all the time.

Meditation (Samadhi): The Buddha was a staunch believer in the powers of samadhi for the attainment of nirvana.

Before he got enlightened he had practised the Hatha Yoga a highly rigorous system of yoga in which the body is mortified in a variety of ways. But after five years he had given it up as ineffectual and recommended simple yoga and samadhi. According to him samadhi is the foolproof way to refine intellect.

Samadhi means visualizing an object and concentrating over it. The Buddha has recommended forty objects as visuals. These are categorized into three groups: *Kamabhava*, things that one likes; *Rupabhava*, things that have form and *Arupabhava*, things that do not have a form, an idea or not even an idea, just concentration pure and simple.

The Buddha has also explained the five stages of meditation: meandering of the mind (Vitarka), thinking (Vichar), liking (Priti), happiness (Sukha) and absolute concentration (Ekagrata). At the beginning the mind tends to wander. But eventually through practice it

passes through all these stages and learns to attain perfect concentration. The Buddha has described one more state of mind following that of absolutely concentrated meditation. It is named Nirodha-Samapatti, The closure of respiration. A yogi could stay in this state maximally for seven days. Though the breath halts the body does not lose its warmth, nor is there danger of death.

Fine Intellect: Fine intellect is one that has the ability of understanding high metaphysics and contributing to it from one's own spiritual experiences.

Nirvana: The Buddha has defined nirvana as the state wherein there is total eradication of all emotions, anger, greed, hatred, sorrow etc. This state can be attained during one's lifetime. It is called Sopadhi-shesha-Nirvana in which the body (Upadhi) is alive. The one that is attained after death is called Nirupadhi-shesha-Nirvana, nirvana beyond body.

Published books of Dharmanand Kosambi

1. *Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha* (1910)
2. *Buddha-Leela-Sara-Sangraha* (1914)
3. *Laghupath* (1917)
4. *Nivedan* (1924)
5. *Jataka Katha, Part I* (1924)
6. *Samadhimarga* (1925)
7. *Bauddha Sanghacha Parichay* (1926)
8. *Hindi Sanskriti and Ahimsa* (1934)
9. *Weda Ivan* (1938)
10. *Bhagwan Buddha* (1939)
11. *Parshwanathacha Chaturyama Dharma* (1941)
12. *Visuddhimagga*
13. *Suttanipat*
14. *Bodhicharyavatar*
15. *Abhidharmartha – Sangraha*
16. *Dhammapad*
17. *Bodhisattva* (A play), published posthumously